Polyhedron®

NEWSZINE

MARCH

93

Conventions

ConnCon, March 25-27
Danbury, CT
Held at the Danbury Hilton and Towers, ConnCon will feature roleplaying, board, miniatures, card, family, war, and interactive games. There will be more RPGA® Network sanctioned AD&D® events than you can play in a weekend, including multiple Living City events, Chemcheaux, and the Land Office for Living City. All of the Living City and many of the other Network events are open to both members and the general public. There will be special deals for members joining and for clubs forming at ConnCon. Other activities include costume, miniatures painting, and art contests, as well as an art show and auction. The dealers' area has a wide variety of items, from hobby items both new and used, to weapons, jewelry, and collectibles. Guests of Honor are Jean Rabe, RPGA Network Coordinator, and Sam Lewis, President of FASA. For more information, or to judge, write to ConnCon, P.O. Box 444, Sherman, CT 06812.

Clare-Voyance, April 8-10
Claremont, CA
Held on the campuses of the Claremont Colleges (about 30 minutes east of Los Angeles). Events include the AD&D game, Shadowrun, RoboTech, Champions, Dangerous Journeys, an art display, and more. GMs welcome. Registration $5, with a $2 fee per game. Write to Games Central, Storyhouse, Claremont McKenna College, Claremont, CA 91711. Call (909) 624-3413 or (909) 624-3664.

Americon, April 16-17
Clayton/Franklinville, NJ
A weekend of fun and excitement will be held at the Clayton American Legion Hall on the Clayton/Franklinville border. Events include the AD&D game, Werewolf, Mummy, Mage, Kult, the RAVENLOFT® setting, Call of Cthulhu, Shadowrun, Battletech, AD&D game Trivia, and more. Special game sessions include an AD&D game benefit tournament for the Children's Hospital in Philadelphia, an RPGA Network RAVENLOFT game, and arena combat battles all weekend long. Other events include an art show, a miniature painting contest, an auction, open gaming, and trial runs of new RPGs. Pre-registration to March 15 is $11 per day. Most game fees will be $2 per game, except the $5 benefit event. Registration at the door is $12 per day. RPGA Network members receive a $1 refund with proof of membership. For more information, call Carl "Thunder" at (609) 589-0556, or write Americon, c/o Carl "Thunder," P.O. Box 125, Mullica Hill, NJ 08012.

Andromeda One, April 22-24
Lincoln, NE
This convention will be held at the Ramada Inn at 141 N. 9th Street, and convention activities include RPGs, dealers' room, 24-hour video room, art show, and panel discussions. Guest of Honor: Katherine Kurtz. For more information, write to Duane Bouchard, 2848 S. 17, Lincoln, NE 68502, Compuserve 71762-1564.

Pointcon XVII, April 22-24
Westpoint, NY
This historical, science fiction, and role playing convention will be held at the United States Military Academy in West Point. Events include the AD&D game, Battletech, Shadowrun, Micro-Armor, Warhammer Fantasy 40K, Johnny Reb, and many more role playing strategy, and board games. RPGA Network-sponsored events will be highlighted during the convention. Other events include a dealers' room, computer gaming, miniature painting contest, and open gaming. Registration is $12 at the door and $10 if pre-registered by mail. There are no event fees. Write to USMA Wargames Committee; ATTN: POINTCON XVII, P.O. Box 2666, West Point, NY 10997.

Briscon '94, April 30-May 2nd
Brisbane, Australia
This convention features many Network events, boardgames, wargames, an art competition, animation videos, medival martial displays, a charity auction, trade stalls, and more. For registration and other information, contact Chris Ryan at +61-7-8708156.

Wyvercon '94, June 17-19
Mount Vernon, WA
This convention will be held at the Skagit County Fair Grounds. Featured events include an RPGA Network AD&D game tournament, a LaserTag arena, and a Saturday night dance. Other events include Battletech, Boffer Chess, a Lost Souls game, 24-hour open gaming, martial arts demos, a miniatures contest, costume contest, dealers' room, on-site food vendors, and more. Camping and RV spaces are available. Pre-registration through May 31 is $15 for the weekend. On-site registration is $20 for the weekend. Send registration fees or inquiries to: Skagit Valley Gamers Association/Wyvercon '94, P.O. Box 2325, Mount Vernon, WA 98273, or call: (206) 855-0197 and ask for Todd or Larianne.

QuinCon IX, July 15-17
Quincy, IL
A fantastic mix of role playing, miniature games, and boardgames featuring RPGA Network tournaments, special guests, and a Saturday auction. Nearly 70 events, featuring both new games and classic favorites. No game fees. For more information, send a SASE to QUINCON IX, c/o Mark Hoskins, 1181 Pratt Street, Barry, IL 62312. Admission fees are $5 for one day or $12 for the weekend.

DragonCon, July 15-17
Atlanta, GA
DragonCon is a multi-media gaming convention which crosses over into science fiction and fantasy, with broad ranges extending to books, art, film, computer animation, special effects, and music. More than 8,000 fans and 500 retailers attended our 1993 Convention. Events include more than 250 hours of role playing, miniature, board, and computer gaming tournaments with pre-registration for individual events, including a $1,000 AD&D Game Team Tournament and a $1,000 Tournament of Champions Board Game event. Additional gaming events include a 24-hour open gaming room, live role playing events, and consignment game auctions.
Pre-registration: Weekend passes good for all three days are $35 prior to March 15, and $40 prior to June 15. Memberships are available at the door for $45, with children six and under admitted free of charge. Special club discounts and day passes are also available. For more information, call the 24-hour info/fax line at (404) 925-2813, or call the DragonCon office at (404) 925-0115. Or write: DragonCon '94, P.O. Box 47696, Atlanta, GA 30362-0696. Three-day registration is also available using Visa, MC, or AMEX by calling Ticketmaster at (404) 249-6400 through July 15.

GEN CON® Game Fair, August 18-21
Milwaukee, WI
Join more than 20,000 gamers at the world's largest multi-media game fair featuring four days of events. The festivities include computer, military, role playing, strategy, miniatures, virtual reality, video, arcade, and board games—more than 1,000 events in all.

GEN CON is also the place to find RPGA Network events. Everything from mulit-round events to Living City tournaments. More than 20 Network events will be available, with terrific prizes given out to the winners. Network members will receive points for playing and judging.

The game fair also features a million-dollar art show, dozens of celebrities, a costume contest, Star Trek guests, comic-book artists, Japanimation, a 200-booth exibit hall, and $10,000 in prize giveaways. For more information, write to: GEN CON Game Fair, P. O. Box 756, Lake Geneva, WI 53147.

About the Cover

James Holloway provides us with another dramatic cover, this time of Mempter and the Smiling Viper as the pair discover their mission may well be "A Fool's Errand."

Polyhedron® NEWSZINE

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If your mailing label reads
"Exp 3.94"
this is your last issue.
Renew today!

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Adversaries

by Steven Schend

Lady Aridarye Phylund

0 Level Human Female

STR: 8
DEX: 11
CON: 9
INT: 17
WIS: 13
CHR: 16

AC: 8
Hit Points: 9
Alignment: Neutral Evil
Age: 37
Hair/Eyes: Black/Brown
Height: 5′ 4″
Weight: 115

Weapon proficiencies: Dagger
Non-weapon proficiencies: Appraising, dancing, etiquette, fashions, forgery, gaming, heraldry
Magical Items: *Ring of protection +2, dagger of venom +1*

Lady Aridarye is an attractive, slender woman often assumed to be much younger than she is. Her hair falls to her waist, though she normally wears it piled in elaborate coiffures confined by her favorite golden headdress. Her eyes are a warm chestnut brown, but many who cross her swear they turn scarlet in her fury! Her aquiline features are made all the more bold by her pale skin and high cheekbones. Her smile, it is said, can dazzle a suitor or freeze the blood of an assassin.

Aridarye wears expensive, form-flattering gowns and dresses, favoring blue and purple. Regardless of her attire, she always has her ornate dagger.

Aridarye is the consummate businesswoman, able to foresee trends in the marketplaces within Waterdeep and the northern Sword Coast. She is far more practiced at bookkeeping and business than most other Waterdhavian nobles. She uses her business sense to outmaneuver the Lords Brokengulf, Gundwynd, and Ilvastarr, her principal rivals, while using her charm and beauty to keep them off guard.

Aridarye, despite other appearances, is a private woman, not apt to reveal secrets. She is the penultimate social chameleon, being many things for many people. Among the social-climbing, money-conscious nobility, she is noted for flawless tact and grace. To customers and fellow merchants, her most noticed trait is her good business sense. She is famous for an almost bell-like laugh, but Aridarye is always tight-lipped and in control when in public.

To her servants, family, and close associates ever since her husband's death, she has been revealed as a high-handed martinet with a great need to feel in control. When pleased, she carries the subtle yet unmistakable air of a promiscuous hedonist (made all the more obvious to many now that she is without her older husband). She is easy to anger, and her temper has been sorely tested in the past six months since the seemingly miraculous return of her stepson, Lord Urtos Phylund II. While never appearing less than the gracious stepmother, she secretly rages at the loss of any of her power with Urtos' attempts at claiming his birthright at the head of his family.

Ultimately, if Aridarye's secrets come out, she will be revealed for what she is: a viper in a comely human shell. People and money are her tools, and she uses them expertly. Her lying comes so naturally that Aridarye cannot tell the truth unless magically forced to do so. If her plans and pleasures are disrupted, Aridarye will bide her time, then strike back at an opportune moment.

Lady Aridarye Phylund is the widow of the elder Lord Urtos Phylund of Waterdeep. She entered the City of Splendors in Alturiak 1359 as the consort to an Amnite trader and soon found herself at home amongst the nobles' parties and intrigues. Her consort met an untimely death in the back alleys of the Southern Ward when trying to pay for goods with counterfeit gold-plated coppers; it was a simple

Continued on page 6

Letters

Children And Dogs And The Living City

We just received a check in the fantastic amount of $3,000. Thank you for this more-than-generous donation to Okada, which was raised at the GEN CON® Game Fair.

We hope that you and your staff had a little fun along with the hard work. We enjoyed ourselves at the convention even if we did arrive ahead of schedule.

We repeat, THANK YOU. The monies that you have raised and donated on our behalf are needed and most appreciated.

Pat Putnam
Okada, Ltd.
Hearing and Specialty Guide Dogs
R.R. No. 1, Box 640F
Fontana, WI 53125

Thank you for the ROLE PLAYING GAMES ASSOCIATION™ Network's generous gift of $5,000 to the Children's Hospital of Wisconsin from your fund-raising at the 1993 GEN CON Game Fair. Your continued support of our special hospital is deeply appreciated.

Children's Hospital is committed to providing the best pediatric health care to children from Wisconsin and beyond. Gifts like yours help us continue to meet the special needs of every child who turns to Children's for care.

Thank you again for your support of our mission.

Jon E. Vice
President
Children's Hospital of Wisconsin
9000 West Wisconsin Avenue
P.O. Box 1997
Milwaukee, WI 53201

The money for the above organizations was raised through a special charity auction and through fees members paid to play in designated AD&D® game tournaments.

The Network will again support the Okada Guide Dog Program and the Children's Hospital of Wisconsin at next summer's GEN CON Game Fair.

Ravens Bluff Questions

My friend and I are new members who joined when we registered for the 1993 GEN CON Game Fair. It was our first time at the Game Fair and only our second convention ever. Naturally, we had a blast.

For both of us, though, our favorite events throughout the convention were the two Living City tournaments we played in. The concept of creating a character according to a set of standards, having that character transferable to other tournaments, and allowing players to participate in the creation of their gaming world are all splendid ideas.

We attended the Living City Seminar beforehand, but did not understand much of what was being talked about. Many of the people in the audience appeared to be longtime players/members in the Network and seemed to know each other quite well. We felt like outsiders listening in on past stories and inside jokes.

Don't get me wrong. This is okay and understandable, as it gives these players a venue to share their experiences. But those who are new and looking for answers and information on the very basics of what the Living City is all about need a time and place to ask our questions and be heard, too.

One thing we are wondering about. When creating a character at first level by assigning points, can elves have a 19 Dexterity if it is "purchased" with a point? (Similar questions are Dwarves' 19 Constitution, etc.) In other words, can the racial maximums for attributes be reached if "purchased"? Or is 18 the highest any race can ever attain? I feel 19 should be possible if "purchased" so long as racial limits are not exceeded. What is the official word?

I understand some rare individuals have tried to cheat by mysteriously acquiring treasures not earned through play or trade at the magic shop. I feel it is vitally important that this is monitored closely, as it reflects on the integrity of our entire campaign.

Also, as you can see by the return address, we don't live very close to any major American cities or Ontario, Canada. Therefore, we are not able to enjoy one of the biggest advantages of belonging to the RPGA Network, which is playing in Living City tournaments due to our remote location.

So, I need information on what is necessary to start having our own tournaments that would meet RPGA Network standards. Who is eligible to judge events? How is information relayed accurately to RPGA Network HQ to be consistent with other tournaments? What constitutes a tournament? Number in attendance? Number of events held? Number of days held?

Dennis R. Rose
Saskatoon, Canada

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and more fantastic creatures for clients, managing fantastic winter and summer hunts for many a Waterdhavian noble, and keeping up his stone hunting lodge in Ardeep Forest.

His downfall began on a peryton hunt in early Alturiak of 1365. A minor servant betrayed the young lord one night by using a magical scroll to summon a huge pack of wolves. The servant planned to gain the favors of Lady Aridarye by doing so, but the magic of the scroll "accidentally" consumed him as well. When the wolves attacked, much of the hunting party was caught unawares. Of eleven people, only one managed to escape alive. Arriving at Waterdeep nine days later, the wounded man reported to Lord Phylund.

All Urtos recalls from the incident is being surrounded by yellow eyes, hot breath, and bared fangs. He also heard a grating growl of a voice say "Back, for he is . . ." This voice haunts his dreams. He awoke on his horse, wounds bound and only a mile from his villa. Three days later, on the advent of a full moon, Urtos underwent the painful transformation into a werewolf.

Regaining command of his mind, Urtos soon realized he could control himself in his lycanthropic forms but could not change at will. Now, Urtos is careful to be "missing" during the three days of the full moon each month.

The younger Lord Urtos Phylund returned to Waterdeep to claim his birthright as the head of the family upon hearing of his father's passing. Without a word, he assumed the mantle of Lord Phylund and took to the business at hand, a lord in his own right. Of course, he could not turn out his stepmother, despite his intuitions about his and his father's "accidents." However, propriety and his return to Waterdeep allow him to keep his enemy under close watch. Never one for court intrigue before, Urtos himself is surprised at how well he adapts to the thinly veiled cut-and-thrust battles of the nobility.

Though he fears what he has become, his position and his inner strength sustain him while his passion for personal justice drive him to prove Aridarye the viper she is without revealing his own secret.

Lady Aridarye Phylund

Continued from page 4

matter of substituting the counterfeit coins while he slept the night before, and she needed an untraceable way to be done with him.

Playing the friendless waif amongst her few noble contacts, she soon gained the trust of Lord Phylund, an elder widower who dealt in exotic creature trading. With Aridarye's help, Lord Urtos' fortunes rose with his trade revenues and the Phylunds gained in social prominence and prestige. Lord Urtos Phylund married Aridarye in Ches 1360, as much in love with her beauty and charm as her seemingly infallible trade instincts.

For five years, the Phylunds were the toast of Waterdhavian society. Lavish balls and exorbitant displays of wealth were the norm for Urtos and his young wife. His eldest son, Urtos II, sickening of the excesses and of his father's preference for his wife's counsel over his own, took to spending more time on the hunt. He soon built and took up near-permanent residence in the Phylund hunting lodge in the Ardeep Forest.

Despite this rift, the Phylund family luck seemed endless until disaster struck in 1365. First, Lord Urtos the younger allegedly fell victim to a wolf pack while on a hunt, and his body was not recovered (an accident carefully arranged by Aridarye).

The grief-stricken father became sullen and careless. While staging an exhibition within the Field of Triumph of his latest monstrous acquisitions, Lord Phylund was slain by a prematurely released owlbear; its cage apparently wasn't locked properly, and his negligence cost him and six other handlers their lives.

Aridarye, playing the grieving widow, laid her husband to rest and compensated the families of the deceased for their losses. Planning to run his business after a reasonable mourning period, she set to keeping it one of the most prosperous concerns in the city (with her pick of many young suitors attracted to her money and her newfound promiscuity). These plans came to a halt when, eight days after his father's funeral and nearly two months after his own disappearance, the younger Lord Urtos Phylund returned to claim his birthright at the head of the family.

Shocked that he survived the wilderness ambush, Aridarye allowed him to usurp her place in the Phylund family. Even after two years bristling as a tolerated stepmother, she manages to hold onto some of her influence and position in hopes of finding Urtos' secrets and using them against him.

While appearing content in her place, she is secretly maneuvering to take over the family again with the help of the smitten Prendergast Brokengulf. All she needs is an edge to use against her stepson.

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Notes From HQ

"Words are also actions, and actions are a kind of words."

Literature classes usually teach three "genres" of fiction: poetry, prose, and drama. Much of our love of fantasy role playing games springs from a love of fantasy prose. But it's drama that comes closest to our hobby.

Role playing and drama aren't the same thing, though they are similar in many ways. In a game, we all take our parts and play them with direction from the game master, much as actors are guided by the director of a play. It's like improvisational theater, except we roll dice to determine some actions. Those games which minimize or eliminate dice altogether are very nearly pure drama, except that the audience usually consists of only the players themselves.

Like drama, role playing depends on language. We don't often act out the contests of the game, and even when we do those contests are at best a sort of pantomime. What we do is say the words, and our imaginations do the rest.

The substitution of words for action is especially important for those who role play in the increasingly common medium of modem communication. When you play face-to-face, you have much more freedom to include gestures, facial expressions, and varied tone and volume of voice. But when you play through the filter of a keyboard, you lose some of your usual modes of communication; you have only text. But with the loss of those gestures, expressions, and voices, wonderful advantages arise. Words become more powerful, and the imagination must do more to envision them.

Some of the advantages to role playing online are obvious. It's far easier, for instance, to imagine your 240-pound linebacker friend Bert playing a diminutive elf enchantress when you can't see or hear him. When Sylvia wants to perform a secret action, she can let the GM know about it without everyone seeing that she has passed a note. And of course there's the advantage of being able to find an adventure, even when you don't have gamer friends in your immediate area.

The most impressive difference in online play is that you have much more control to shape your character and his actions. Among other advantages, you can speak in dialect even if you have no verbal talent for it; you can type "sound effects" and other dramatic descriptions that you might otherwise omit. And you have just a little more time to revise what you are "saying" before hitting the return key. Of course, you find yourself considerably more conscious of every word that you type.

There are plenty of electronic services available, both commercial and private. Some are free or very inexpensive. The commercial services are usually more costly, but they have much broader and more impressive offerings. On both GEnie and America Online you can even find Network clubs formed from members who know each other only through the windows of their monitors.

If you have a computer with a modem, check out online gaming. If you are already gaming online, tell us a little about your personal experiences in the electronic world. Write to us here at the Newszine, or send us e-mail at our GEnie account, TSR.RPGA. You can also reach us via internet mail, at tsr.online@genie.geis.com. Please don't expect lengthy responses to e-mail. If you want to be sure of a quick response, ask questions which require only a short answer.

"To offer it the show of violence."

One of the things online role playing emphasizes is the importance of dialogue and interaction in games. It's fun to play in games with a lot of combat, but it's usually a poor game in which character and story are neglected in favor of a series of violent conflicts. Don't get me wrong: action and a certain amount of combat are important elements of a good game. But remember that action and violence are not the same thing. In Network tournaments and Newszine submissions, we'd like to see more action encounters which do not depend on violence. When writing for us, try substituting some fight scenes with physically challenging encounters that depend on ability and proficiency checks instead of on fighting monsters. Next time you fill a room, give it a chandelier to swing from, some barrels to roll, or some draperies to climb. And then give the characters a reason to swing, roll, and climb! These are the simplest of examples, but you can invent far more clever and unusual challenges for the PCs, testing their abilities and ingenuity.

"Sweet are the uses of adversity."

You'll notice a new department starting this issue. "Adversaries" is similar to "The Rogues Gallery," yet it has an important twist: Each pair of characters must have a history of conflict that links them in enmity. We'd like to see your submissions for this department, so that's all you have to keep in mind: conflict, enmity, motivation. Just remember that adversaries don't necessarily need to be hero and villain. Two wonderfully virtuous and noble characters might find themselves locked into conflict for tragic reasons. Or perhaps two despicable characters may become mortal enemies over conflicting goals. In any event, submit your adversaries in the same format as you see in this issue's debut, and be sure that each can fit on one page with a 1/4 page portrait illustration (write about 800 words).

In the past few months we at HQ have been delighted to receive copies of several clubs' newsletters. Now to be honest, I didn't expect much considering that these newsletters usually are produced without financial backing.

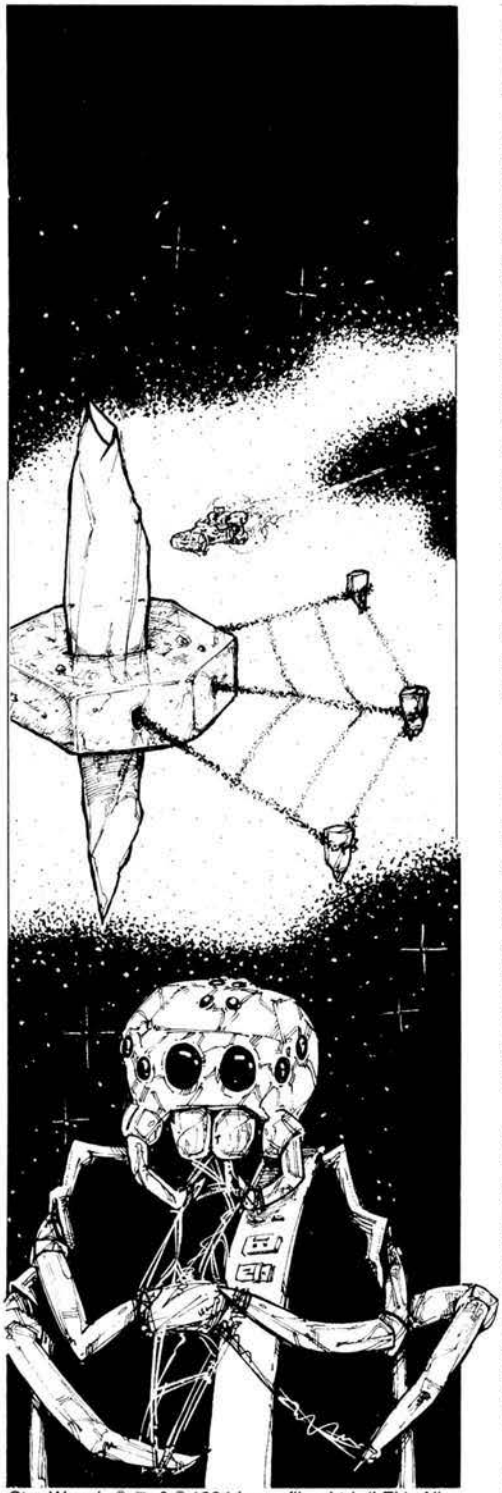
Imagine my delight to see what excellent newsletters the clubs are producing. Some of the best newsletters I've seen recently are from the Role Players' Guild of Kansas City, the Order of the Triangle, and the Players Guild of Central Oklahoma. If your club produces a newsletter, please send us a copy. We love reading them, and we'd like to be able to make special mention of those which are particularly good.

Sayonara,

Dave ❑

Crystal Web Space Station

A Setting for the *Star Wars: New Republic* Campaign



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by Bill Slavicsek and Michele Carter

In issues #86 and 90, we helped move your *Star Wars: The Roleplaying Game* campaign ahead in time by dealing with the events depicted in the film, *Return of the Jedi*. Now we're ready to take that lightspeed jump into the era beyond *Jedi*, to go where the newest novels and comics are going—the era of the New Republic! To do this, we need first to understand what's happening in the galaxy. Then we need a place to base your Rebel—oops, Republic—player characters. That place is the strange and intriguing Crystal Web Space Station.

The information presented is for use with *Star Wars: The Roleplaying Game Second Edition* from West End Games. While they could be altered to fit any science fiction game setting, the details and specifics work best in the *Star Wars* galaxy.

Current Events

The Rebel Alliance won the Battle of Endor and struck a devastating blow to the Empire. Not only have the Emperor and Darth Vader been killed, but the second Death Star has been destroyed—along with a significant portion of the main Imperial battle fleet. Winning this battle doesn't mean the Alliance has won the war, however. There is still a lot to do to make the galaxy safe and to loosen the iron grip of the Empire.

What is the current state of the galaxy? Simply put, the Empire is in disarray. While it may take weeks or even months for the news of Emperor Palpatine's death to spread from star system to star system, Imperial Command's cohesiveness has been torn asunder. No single authority leads the military the way the Emperor did. In fact, with the vacuum created by Palpatine's death, high-level leaders from all over the Empire are vying to take charge.

Moffs and Grand Moffs have sealed their star sectors and declared their own independent governments. Grand Admirals have gathered the military forces under their control and have begun carving out their own small domains from the Galactic Empire.

In some sectors, on some worlds, it's business as usual. Imperial garrisons continue to keep the peace; Imperial leaders continue to govern while they wait for a new emperor to emerge from the internal struggle. Many enslaved worlds, like the Wookiee planet Kashyyyk, still labor under Imperial taskmasters. In a few systems, where the Empire's hold was not as strong, the populace has risen up to throw off their chains.

The Core worlds carry on mostly as they always have—at least as far as the common citizen is concerned. Here, the Empire maintains a solid grip, though the upper echelons of power wage a secret battle for supremacy. In the future, a Prophet of the Dark Side or a Grand Admiral or a Grand Moff or a clone of the Emperor will emerge to rally the Empire, but for now its slow death throes cause the many lines of command to unravel into anarchy. In the Rim Territories, the disruption of authority is much more noticeable.

In the midst of this chaos, whole systems have broken free to openly join the Alliance. Already, Rebels refer to themselves as the New Republic, though the official announcement is still some weeks away, and no laws or charters have been drawn up. Republic forces are solidifying their holds on these newly declared member worlds, doing everything possible to protect them from the erupting chaos in the Empire.

This is the state of the galaxy. The New Republic has its hands full getting a government off the ground, while the Empire struggles to keep itself together.

Crystal Web Station

Information never has been more important to the emerging Republic. Moods, attitudes, news, and current events need to be monitored across a thousand sectors, in 10,000 star systems, and on a million inhabited worlds. For this reason, operatives are being sent to galactic crossroads to watch, listen, and learn what they can

from those who travel the space lanes. One such crossroads sits at a hyperlane cluster in deep space, on the edge of an ion nebula, far from any settled star systems. It is to this out-of-the-way, increasingly more important cluster that the Republic player characters are sent to gather information and study galactic trends. They travel to a place called Crystal Web Station.

Crystal Web Station is a space station built around a huge crystal asteroid that floats in deep space. Three massive engines anchor it in place, holding it in a web of glowing energy lines. These engines keep the station from drifting, maintaining a constant location for arriving ships. Without the engines, the station would slip into the nearby nebula, where the clouds of ionized gas could cause severe damage to the computer and electronics systems.

Due to the peculiarities of hyperspace travel, Crystal Web Station has become a necessary stopping point for ships traveling along three major hyperlanes. One lane connects the Imperial Core Worlds to the Corporate Sector. The second lane provides a pathway from one edge of the Outer Rim Territories to the other, giving merchants and the Republic fast access to these areas.

The third lane connects the Corellia systems to the neutral worlds of the Inner Rim, creating an important trade route for the Corellian spacefarers. All three lanes provide the fastest travel time between these areas with the least amount of jumps.

Hyperspace travel sends ships through a parallel dimension that greatly reduces the time and distance needed to move from one star system to another. In fact, many jumps would be nearly instantaneous except for the gravity shadows projected from realspace into hyperspace. On any given trip, a ship might have to drop out of lightspeed to avoid gravity shadows many times, forcing it to recalculate and jump over and over again. The most advantageous drop-and-jump point along the three hyperlanes in question is the vicinity around Crystal Web Station. From this location, all of the major star systems along each route can be accessed with a single recalculated jump, thus cutting days or even weeks off the longest hauls.

Until recently (about five years ago, just before the true start of the galactic civil war), a significant problem forced star travelers to bypass this hyperlane cluster and use a slower, less direct pathway. That problem is the ionized cloud of cosmic dust called the Voidfire Nebula.

Voidfire Nebula

The Voidfire Nebula stretches across a vast region of space, covering as much territory as a medium-sized star system. This cosmic storm crackles with charged particles and explosions of color. Even at a distance, the nebula throws off so much static and energy that ship computers and electronic systems could suffer ion damage just by being in the vicinity. All hyperspace jump points within the sector fall within the area of effect of the nebula. If a ship tries to do something other than simple flying, or if it moves too close to the nebula, roll 1d6. At the farthest distances, a roll of 1 indicates that ionization damage has occurred. Roll on the Ionization Damage Table in the rulebook to determine the effects of the damage. The closer a ship gets to the nebula, the greater the chance of ionization damage, up to 1—5 on 1d6 at the very edge. Inside the nebula, ionization damage is automatic. Crystal Web Station sits at the halfway point, so ships near it are affected on a 1—3 on 1d6.

One other effect permeates the entire area. The charged energy emanating from the nebula wreaks havoc on navigation systems and astrogation computers. For this reason, even though astrogators had long ago calculated the benefits of this region of space as far as hyperspace travel was concerned, few pilots were brave enough or good enough to chance making a jump through the interference field.

In game terms, characters are better off recalculating lightspeed jumps without nav computer assistance (+30 to the difficulty number). If they attempt to use their nav computers, the ion interference greatly *increases* the difficulty instead of *decreasing* it (+35 to +60—roll 5d6 and add the total to +30 to get the difficulty number).

With the appearance of Crystal Web Station, the benefits of the area's hyperspace jump points suddenly became accessible to all space travelers—for a price.

History Lesson

First there was just the Voidfire Nebula. Then, sometime between the Imperial regional survey of 12 years ago and the accident that forced Daran Tal's scout ship out of hyperspace five years back, the Crystal Web Station was constructed. The intelligent crystal spiders called Lucents (the name given to them by Tal) built the station as a place to interact and get to know the other members of the galactic community.

The Lucents welcomed Daran Tal to the station, and he quickly formed friendships with the crystalline beings. He learned some things about them, but they remain secretive about their home world. When asked, they simply gesture vaguely toward the nebula.

In the month he spent with them, Tal discovered that the Lucents were natural astrogators. They use no instruments to plot courses or to calculate jumps; they do it instinctively.

Additionally, their crystal technology is based on principles similar to but different from the technology used by the Empire and Republic. They have hyperdrives and sublight drives, repulsors and blasters. Instead of using wires and circuitry, they employ crystalline webs and energy-charged gems. The Lucent machinery, because of its strange components and configurations, does not suffer ill effects from the ion-charged nebula.

The more Tal learned about them, the more he became convinced that this Crystal Web Station could provided the Lucents with the contact they desired while turning a tidy profit. He outlined his plan to the Lucent leaders, got their agreement, then had them calculate a jump for his ship so that he could put his plan into motion.

When Daran Tal returned two months later, he brought with him a small staff to work the station. He hoped to turn Crystal Web Station into a smaller version of Cloud City, designed to serve travelers in need of quicker routes along the three primary hyperlanes running through the area. Knowing that the Imperials have a distinct dislike of non-humans, Tal took the title of Baron Administrator and became the visible leader of the station.

The Lucents, the real leaders, remained behind the scenes, keeping the station in good repair, guiding ships through the ionized regions, and calculating lightspeed jumps.

The Lucents guide incoming ships to the station in their small, powerful, crystal star tugs. From these work ships, the crystal spiders can visually or manually escort ships from their

realspace entry point to Crystal Web Station. When these ships are ready to leave, a star tug hooks its uplink arm into any available access port to load jump coordinates directly into waiting nav computers. With the coordinates safely loaded, ships can make the jump to lightspeed at their own convenience. The Lucents perform these functions while they watch, listen, and learn what they can about the human-dominated Empire and the areas of known space surrounding it.

The Lucents built Crystal Web Station for the comfort of humanoid races. Except for their private levels and the hidden access tubes, the station looks much like any deep space station located throughout Imperial or Republic space. Even in the areas designed specifically to accommodate humans and humanoid races, alien touches abound. The architecture has a distinctive web pattern, and crystalline construction can be seen throughout.

Republic Mission

The New Republic used the services of Crystal Web Station many times during the galactic civil war. Once the station became operational and open to the public, its importance as a hyperlane transfer point made it indispensable to all factions—Imperial, Alliance, corporate, and even the fringe society groups.

This high level of importance made it a naturally neutral site, though those who normally operate in the shadows (including the fringe groups and the Alliance) tried their best to remain cloaked from obvious scrutiny. Now, with the Empire reduced to fighting holding actions to keep its territory instead of ranging out to destroy Rebel strongholds, neutrality has a greater meaning. They may not like it, but if they come to Crystal Web Station, then they must follow the rules set down by Daran Tal and his staff. These rules must be obeyed by all visitors, regardless of what faction they represent.

The PCs might be Republic agents who have been ordered to set up a base on Crystal Web Station. From this base of operations—whether it's under cover as shop owners, as station employees, as merchants seeking goods to trade, or as free mercenaries setting up a base, or anything else—the Republic agents must gather news from all systems along the three hyperlanes that pass through the area.

Most importantly, the Provisional Council of the New Republic seeks information concerning Imperial strength in various systems, signs of Imperial build up, or news that a particular world or system has begun to rebel against its Imperial masters. Of course, any other important news that comes their way should be investigated and reported, especially if it could be of benefit or detriment to the Republic.

This mission is considered high priority and secret. The agents are not to reveal their connection to the New Republic unless absolutely necessary. In this way, they can attempt to gather information from all sources without fear of prejudice or reprisal.

Of course, Daran Tal doesn't really care what faction they belong to. As long as they don't cause trouble, they can go about their business. (He knows that beings from all over come to Crystal Web Station to find out information.)

Whatever cover the operatives decide to establish should be maintained at all costs. The Council suggests that identities as merchants or shopkeepers would provide the agents with the most options as far as dealing with all factions is concerned, but any logical reason for a prolonged stay on the station will work just as well.

The first adventure a GM puts together for Crystal Web Station should encompass the efforts of Republic operatives to put their cover story into place, as well as exploring the facilities available to them.

A Tour of the Station

Klaar, the chief of security, has one important rule that everyone on Crystal Web Station must follow: Disturbances will not be tolerated. What constitutes a disturbance in the mind of the Defel security chief varies with the situation, but for the most part he doesn't appreciate theft, assault, or blaster play in the station. He doesn't give a mynock's wing about Rebels or Imperials or the Cause of the Week. Just keep to your own business and keep your weapons holstered if you plan to remain on the outside of Klaar's detention cells. So much for advice; now on to locations.

A. Levels 100-90. The top levels of the station house the control centers and administrative offices that keep the place running smoothly. Lucent controllers monitor all incoming and outgoing space traffic, watch for changes in the ion field emanating from the nebula, and oversee all station systems. The baron administrator also has offices for himself and his staff on these levels, though he and the security chief spend more of their time wandering the station than staying cooped up in their office complexes.

B. Levels 89-80. The second series of levels descending through the station are called the merchant and visitor decks. For those visiting the station, this is the heart of the complex. Hangar bays and maintenance docks give way to port services and a ring of inns. The hangar bays range from small craft bays to extending docks to multideck hangars suitable for large freighters and small capital ships. There are hangars located all over the exterior hull of the station, but visitors are most often directed to those connecting to levels 80 to 89. Port services include refueling depots, maintenance and repair stations, customs and inspection, trade councils, and jump coordinate scheduling.

The usual cost for receiving a hyperspace coordinate uplink is 10 credits times the ship's cargo capacity in metric tons. The inns situated throughout the port services' ring range from multibed bunk houses to luxury suites that cost a small fortune. There is a place to rest and clean up for every taste and budget.

The merchant ring, built around the crystal core, features a wide assortment of shops, cantinas, restaurants, casinos, and entertainment facilities. Most visitors frequent these decks, basking in the light of the beautiful crystal while they conduct business, meet people, spend credits, and have fun.

As these decks were furnished by the merchants who established shops here, they are the most "human" in feel and design. The outer structure and station surrounding these shops, however, maintain the alien design favored by the Lucents.

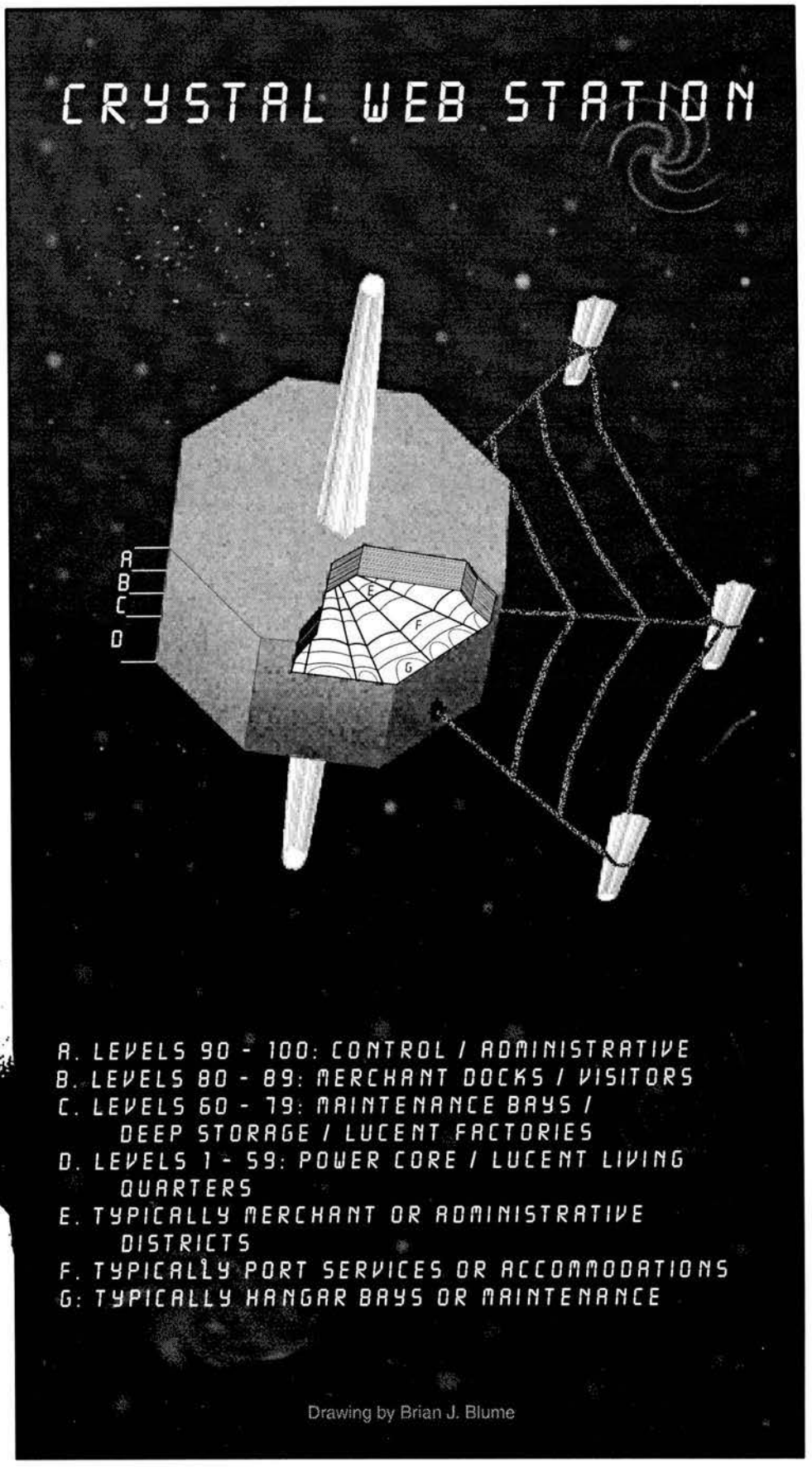
C. Levels 79—60. These decks are usually off limits to visitors. This is the area where many of the Lucents work, and access tubes leading throughout the station originate here. Most of the crystal star tugs are docked in the service bays, while maintenance bays and deep storage facilities stretch toward the crystal core. Many station supplies are stored in special units on these decks. In addition, the Lucents

maintain a number of huge factories designed to accommodate their unusual manufacturing style. The most impressive of these are the gigantic crystal web looms used to weave kilometers of crystalline building materials.

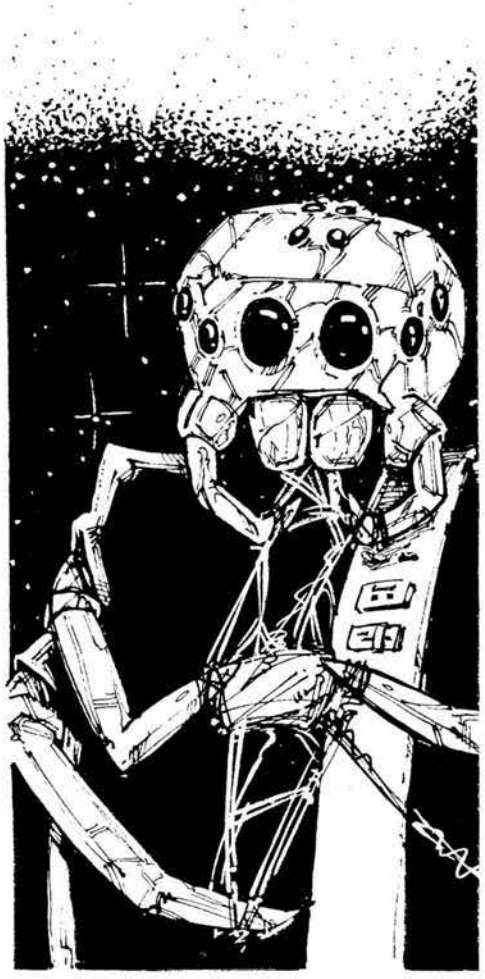
D. Levels 59—1. The upper decks of these levels house the Lucent living areas. This is the most alien portion of the station, for it is designed to provide maximum comfort to the crystal spiders. Crystal webs stretch across these open decks to form nest platforms. On each platform, a different Lucent family keeps a modest nest. Below, dropping to the very bottom of the station and built into the crystal core itself, power cells and energy generators hum and glow. These provide power to the entire station, much the same way human-designed power cells do. But the technology appears alien, for it takes the form of crystals and glowing web lines that look as beautiful as they are functional.

More about Crystal Web Station

Next time we'll explore Crystal Web Station in more detail as we set out a number of adventure options designed to get GMs thinking in the right direction. We'll also meet a few more of the people who inhabit the station. Until then, take a look at the characters that follow.


CRYSTAL WEB STATION
A
B
C
D
E
F
G
A. LEVELS 90 - 100: CONTROL / ADMINISTRATIVE
B. LEVELS 80 - 89: MERCHANT DOCKS / VISITORS
C. LEVELS 60 - 79: MAINTENANCE BAYS / DEEP STORAGE / LUCENT FACTORIES
D. LEVELS 1 - 59: POWER CORE / LUCENT LIVING QUARTERS
E. TYPICALLY MERCHANT OR ADMINISTRATIVE DISTRICTS
F. TYPICALLY PORT SERVICES OR ACCOMMODATIONS
G: TYPICALLY HANGAR BAYS OR MAINTENANCE

Drawing by Brian J. Blume



T'kyl
Template Type: Alien Navigator
Loyalty: To her people
Height: 1.1 meter
Species: Lucent
Homeworld: Unknown
Age: Unknown
DEXTERITY 3D
Dodge 4D
KNOWLEDGE 2D
Planetary systems 5D, willpower 3D
MECHANICAL 3D+1
Astrogation 8D+2, crystal star tug piloting 5D, sensors 4D+1
PERCEPTION 4D
Investigation 5D
STRENGTH 1D
Climb/jump 2D+2
TECHNICAL 4D+2
Computer programming/repair 7D+1, droid programming 6D+2, space transport repair: star tugs 6D+2
Force Sensitive?: Yes
Force Points: 2
Dark Side Points: 0
Character Points: 5
Move: 6
Equipment: Datapad (of Lucent design)
Quote: "May I examine your ship? The modifications to the hyperdrive are quite innovative!"
Description: T'kyl is the chief Lucent navigator and scientist on the station, though she usually delegates common navigation tasks to her staff. T'kyl can usually be found wandering around Crystal Web Station, observing the different factions and races the station serves. She is especially fascinated with technology she has not encountered before.

The Lucent scientist has a great sense of humor and an insatiable curiosity concerning other intelligent beings. She is friendly, outgoing, and much more willing to start friendships than other members of her species. She considers Daran Tal one of her closest friends.

Lucent
Attribute Dice: 18
Attribute Minimums/Maximums:
Dexterity: 1D/4D
Knowledge: 1D/4D
Mechanical: 2D+2/4D
Perception: 2D/4D
Strength: 1D/2D
Technical: 3D+1/4D+2
Move: 6
Height: 1 meter/1.4 meters
Quote: "The Weave touches all. Can you not see it?"
Special Skills:
Astrogation: The Lucents have a unique ability based on their special connection with the Force and their instinctive grasp of spatial relationships. Without the use of navigation computers or astromech droids, Lucents can calculate the safest, fastest, and (usually) the most convenient route through hyperspace between two points. This ability is similar to the Jedi ability *instinctive astrogation control*, described in the *Fragments from the Rim* Galaxy Guide from West End Games.
Special Abilities:
Force Sensitive: The spider-like Lucents have a different perception of the Force from other sentient creatures. As befits their physicality, they call the Force "the Life-Web" or "the Weave" and are familiar if not overly practiced in its use. All Lucents can "see" the Weave as a web of shining crystal strands. Note that though all Lucents are in effect Force-sensitive, it is a rare member of this race who chooses to actually develop Force powers. Those who do cannot use the Weave to influence or read minds, and rarely use it to affect others in any way at all. They are, however, quite adept at the manipulation of the Weave for physical effects, in particular *telekinesis* and similar skills.
Description: The crystal spiders known as the Lucents (a name Daran Tal gave them, as their own language is unpronounceable by humanoids) are insatiably curious about all other races and their technologies. Scientists by nature, they wanted to establish Crystal Web Station as a place where they could meet and interact with other members of the galactic community, and with the Baron Administrator's help they've done so. Though nearly nothing is known about where the Lucents came from and how they knew so much about humans before the station was established (after all, they built Crystal Web Station before Tal showed up), the Lucents have proven themselves to be trustworthy, honorable beings who honestly seem to want nothing more than to learn about the other inhabitants of the galaxy. It has been speculated that the Lucents have a vast and highly advanced civilization beyond the nebula, but the Lucents shrug off all such conjecture.

Crystal Star Tug
Craft: Lucent Crystal Star Tug
Type: Utility worker craft (sublight drive)
Scale: Starfighter
Skill: Space transports: star tugs
Crew: 1
Passengers: 2
Cargo Capacity: None
Hyperdrive Multiplier: None
Hyperdrive Backup: None
Nav Computer: None
Maneuverability: 1D
Space: 2
Atmosphere: 90; 260 kmh
Hull: 2D+2
Shields: 1D
Sensors:
Passive: 15/1D
Scan: 30/2D
Search: 45/3D
Focus: 2/2D+1
Weapons:
Laser Cannon
Fire Arc: Front
Crew: 1 (pilot)
Skill: Starship gunnery
Fire Control: 1D
Space Range: 1-3/6/15
Damage: 2D

Groundling

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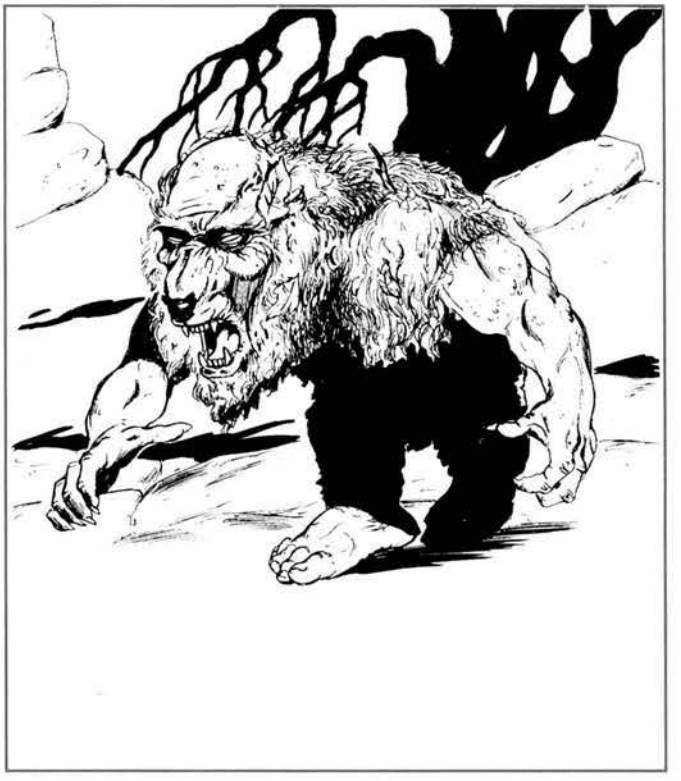
CLIMATE:	Any
FREQUENCY:	Very Rare
ORGANIZATION:	Packs
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Any (prefer nocturnal)
DIET:	Omnivore
INTELLIGENCE:	Low (5-7)
TREASURE:	K,M
ALIGNMENT:	Lawful Evil
NO. APPEARING:	2-8
ARMOR CLASS:	4
MOVEMENT:	6, Br 12
HIT DICE:	3+6
THAC0:	17
NO. OF ATTACKS:	3
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	1-4/1-4/1-8
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Tracking
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	+4 saving throw vs spell, wand, stave, rod, and poison
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Nil
SIZE:	M (4' and taller)
MORALE:	Elite (13-14)
XP VALUE:	175



Groundlings are a magically altered race of Zhentarim assassins created from dwarves who have been hideously transformed to resemble a cross between dwarves and giant badgers.

Groundlings are typically short and stocky, and they easily can be mistaken for dwarves at a distance. Stunted ears are buried in wild fur, and the eyes reduced to narrow slits. A long, bristled snout replaces the dwarven nose, and large fangs protrude from the extended mouth. A groundling's hands end in powerful talons sharper than swords. Groundlings generally stink of spoiled meat.

Groundlings are not very intelligent, but they are extremely cunning. They serve their Zhentarim masters by tracking down and destroying their enemies.

Groundlings have the magically enhanced ability to track any creature by scent alone, once provided with an object the creature has handled. Groundlings are able to sniff out any clothing previously worn by the intended target—and handled by no one else for more than a few moments.

Balancing the keen sense of smell of a groundling is its weak eyesight. Groundlings dislike daylight and are typically encountered only at night.

Groundlings rarely leave their tunnels, and they are capable of burrowing at astounding speeds.

Groundlings are bound by highly structured guild rules and will avoid killing creatures other than their intended targets. If ordered to return their target alive, groundlings will attempt to subdue their victim. Otherwise they will kill and devour the unfortunate creature.

Combat: In combat, groundlings will burrow below their victims and explode upward in a shower of rock and dirt. Any creature attacked by a burrowing groundling receives a −3 adjustment to surprise. Such burrowing attacks are made at +2 to hit.

In combat, a groundling will grab its victim with powerful claws and sharp fangs, then attempt to drag it below the surface. If a groundling successfully hits with any two attacks in one round, it will drag the victim into its burrow at the end of the round. Creatures dragged into a groundling burrow warren can attack only with small or natural weapons, and those at a −2 penalty. Groundlings attack at +2 to hit and damage while within their tunnels.

Once in the tunnels, a creature can be pulled out only with a combined strength of 23 or greater, counting both the victim and any assistants.

Habitat/Society: Groundlings have no true society, created as they are by the Zhentarim to serve as assassins. Most resent their enslavement, but all follow the orders of their guild except in extreme circumstances.

When not based in the dungeons of the Darkhold, groundlings are almost always found just below the surface of the earth, where they form small warrens in which to rest.

Ecology: Groundlings have voracious appetites; they are willing to eat almost anything, although they prefer meat. Groundlings have an extremely high metabolic rate, so they need tremendous amounts of sustenance to fuel their magically enhanced burrowing.

Source: "The Family Business," by James Lowder, in the *Realms of Valor* anthology.

Deathmirror Beetle

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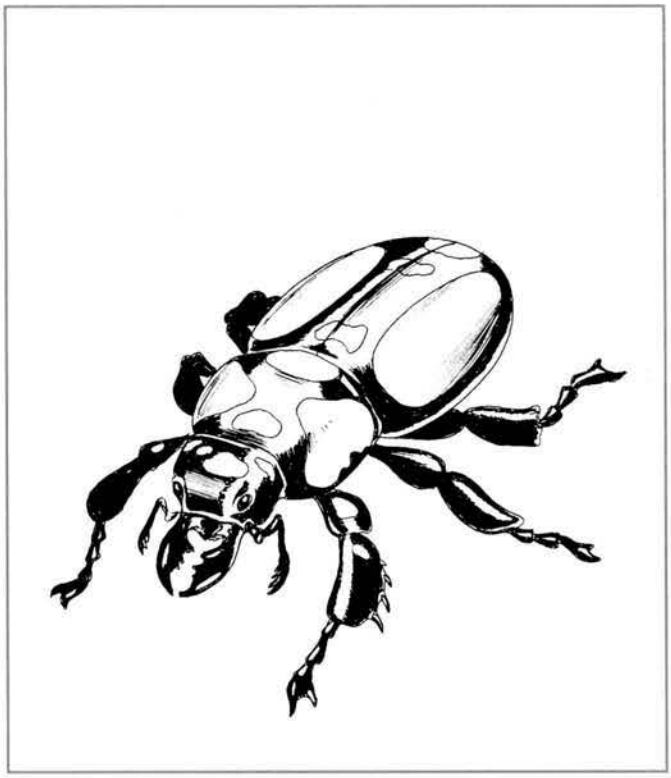
CLIMATE:	Any (usually subterranean)
FREQUENCY:	Very Rare
ORGANIZATION:	Solitary
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Any
DIET:	Omnivore
INTELLIGENCE:	Non-(0)
TREASURE:	Nil
ALIGNMENT:	Neutral

NO. APPEARING:	1 (rarely 2)
ARMOR CLASS:	4
MOVEMENT:	1
HIT DICE:	1 hp
THAC0:	special (20)
NO. OF ATTACKS:	1
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	1
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Special
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Nil
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Nil
SIZE:	T (1″ diameter)
MORALE:	Average (8)
XP VALUE:	35



Deathmirror beetles are small black beetles with bright yellow blotches. These tiny insects have a unique form of magical defense, probably developed through experimentation by some mad wizard, enabling them to magically link creatures in pain via their venomous bites.

Combat: Deathmirror beetles will avoid combat unless handled by bare flesh. If touched by naked flesh, a deathmirror beetle will immediately attempt to bite its handler.

Deathmirror beetles are hard to catch. Anyone attempting to grab a deathmirror beetle must make a successful Dexterity check and also a successful attack against AC 4 (without strength bonus).

The bite of a deathmirror beetle injects a potent venom, requiring a save versus poison with a −6 penalty to avoid its effects. The beetle's sting creates a magical link between the insect's two most recent victims. The mirror image of any physical damage suffered by either of the linked victims is also suffered by the other. This magical link lasts until a new victim is bitten by the beetle or one of the two most recent victims is slain. If one victim fails a saving throw and suffers damage as a result, the other victim still gets a separate saving throw, but at a −4 penalty.

Each time a deathmirror beetle successfully bites a victim, there is a 5% cumulative chance that the beetle will die.

Anyone casting a *raise dead* or *resurrection* on a dead deathmirror beetle must save versus spell at −10 or die instantly and irrevocably. The beetle will not be brought back to life.

Habitat/Society: Deathmirror beetles are often found in forests and are usually solitary, breeding only once in their lifetimes. Males die immediately after breeding, and females live only long enough to give birth to 10-100 young two weeks later.

Ecology: Deathmirror beetles are magically constructed variants of common beetles and occupy a similar niche in the food chain. Natural predators of beetles soon learn to avoid this species due to their indirectly deadly venom.

Source: "King's Tear," by Mark Anthony, in the *Realms of Valor* anthology.

Shadevar

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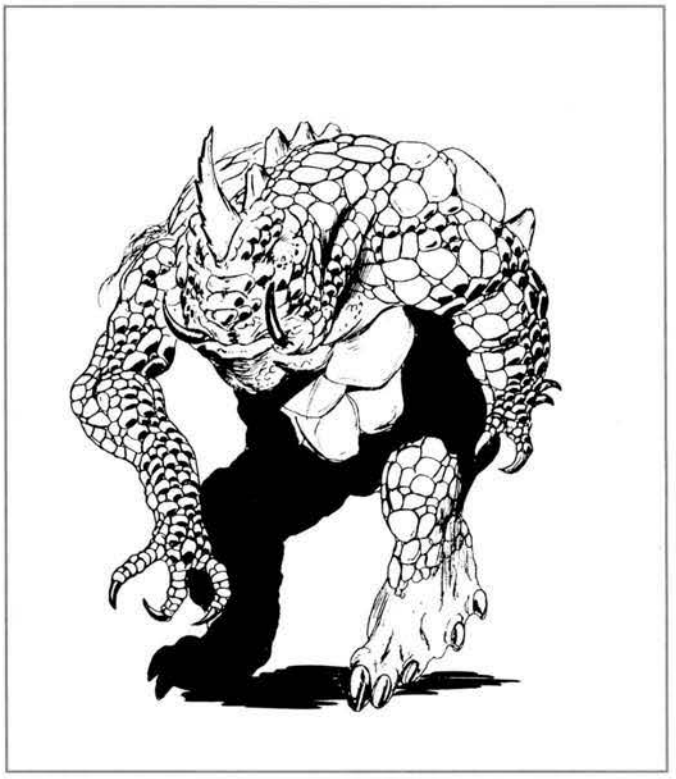
CLIMATE:	Any (Western Central Faerun)
FREQUENCY:	Extremely Rare
ORGANIZATION:	Solitary
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Any
DIET:	Special
INTELLIGENCE:	High (13-14)
TREASURE:	Nil
ALIGNMENT:	Chaotic Evil

NO. APPEARING:	1
ARMOR CLASS:	0
MOVEMENT:	24
HIT DICE:	12
THAC0:	9
NO. OF ATTACKS:	2
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	3-18/3-18
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Special
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Special
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	70%
SIZE:	L (7' tall)
MORALE:	Champion (15-16)
XP VALUE:	13,000



The shadevari are ancient creatures, perhaps older than the Realms themselves. There were originally 13 of these creatures, but most have been destroyed.

For thousands of years, the shadevari served Bhaal, Lord of Murder. Ultimately, Azuth banished them from the worlds of humans and gods.

A shadevar appears as a misshapen beast, vaguely humanoid. The body and face of a shadevar is covered with thick, iron-gray scales. Two black tusks jut from its maw, and a single serrated horn curves from its brow. Two faint depressions replace the shadevar's eyes, as it is completely sightless. At will, a shadevar can extend sharp talons from its fingertips.

A shadevar can "see" by using its sense of smell. This sense is so acute that the shadavar's blindness is in no way a hindrance to its perceptions.

Combat: Shadevari are terrible foes who move with lightning quickness (+3 initiative bonus) and fight with their talons for two terrible rending attacks each round.

The very presence of a shadevar causes *fear* (as the wizard spell) in any creature of low or lesser intelligence within 60 feet.

In normal combat, shadevari are unaffected by *light* or *darkness* spells. An opponent can momentarily escape a shadevar by moving more than 60' upwind of the monster, but a shadevar can track by scent using the tracking proficiency rules with a base proficiency score of 16.

Shadevari are hit only by +1 or better magical weapons. They regenerate 3 hit points per round, starting the round after being injured. Fire, cold, water, electrical, and other magical attacks do not prevent the regeneration, but Shadevari avoid water if at all possible. They seek shelter from rain at once, and they will refuse to cross rivers and streams unless they can do so without becoming wet. Water-based attacks cause +1 damage/die to shadevari.

If a shadevar is somehow given the power to see (through a *cure blindness or deafness, true seeing,* or similar spell) and is then exposed to a bright light (such as that produced by a *lightning bolt, light,* or *continual light* spell), it will suffer 3d6 points of damage per round of exposure. Exposure to such light drives shadevari mad (treat as Intelligence of 1) for 24 hours, after which it recovers.

The only way to kill a shadevar permanently is to pierce its heart. Piercing the heart requires an attack roll of an unmodified 20 with a +4 or better weapon. If the heart of a shadevar is pierced, its body will erupt in a geyser of blood, killing it (without regeneration). Within a few hours, the body will begin to decay rapidly, leaving only cinders.

Habitat/Society: Shadevari are solitary and nearly extinct from the Realms. They do not breed away from their native Plane of Shadows. A shadevar is essentially immortal unless slain by magic.

The last shadevar may or may not have been killed in the Fields of the Dead by the expanded Fellowship of the Dreaming Dragon in the Year of the Wave, 1364 DR. Some sages speculate that another shadevar is imprisoned in the Crypt of Shadows (see FRQ1, *Haunted Halls of Eveningstar*) located somewhere within the Stonelands of northern Cormyr.

Ecology: Shadevari are not native to the Realms and serve no useful function in the ecology, except as predators of human and demi-humankind.

Source: *Crypt of the Shadowking,* by Mark Anthony.

Elminster's Everwinking Eye

Treasures of the Vast, Part Five

by Ed Greenwood

Spells to dust, coins to rust
Nothing is left at your last sunset.
Do what you dream of doing
Of long-ago deeds they talk yet.

Shandreth of Highmoon, bard
Tears on a Crystal Ball (ballad)
Year of the Staff

Our treasure tour of the Vast concludes in this column. Elminster warns me that dwarven treasures (from the time they ruled the Vast) and any orc treasures (from their even earlier rule) haven't yet been mentioned in our quick survey. And we've no doubt missed a number of human treasure caches, too. Well, if any important finds come to light, I'll report them here.

Thindilar

This market town at the meeting of the Cross Road and Blaern's Trail is a bustling center of artisans and crafters who have little time for such fancies as tales of adventure and treasure.

In fact, there is only one local treasure tale of note: In the early days of the Vast, before humans ruled, a "cloud castle" or aerial fortress inhabited by cloud giants crashed to earth here, its spells overcome in a magical battle.

The castle struck the ground at high speed and shattered, leaving a trail of earth-shaking destruction as it rumbled along. The huge, soft-gold goblets and other treasures of the cloud giants were scattered over the countryside. Many were soon carried off by dwarves and reworked into fine gold items. But a few, the tales say, were buried deep in the ruins of the castle, or hung high in the air, still captured by a shred of the magic that had kept the castle aloft.

Most dwarves claim tales of "missed" giant treasure around Thindilar are pure fancy, and Elminster is inclined to agree. But he points out that a shard of pure gold as large as a cottage door was found only three winters ago by a merchant digging out a storage-cellar, and that skeptics in the Realms are often surprised.

Three Trees Pass

The long and dangerous cleft between The Troll Mountains and the Giantspike Mountains would probably have been avoided by men altogether if it weren't for the rich ore deposits brought down into this valley by the dwarves.

As events unfolded, The North Road was put through this once-desolate pass (called "Three Trees Pass" because its height was once marked by three huge old pines, the only trees in sight), linking Kurth with King's Reach. Creating the pass cost many human lives, but probably saved the last few dwarves from extinction at the hands of the ever-plentiful orcs.

Vicious battles for control of the mountain heights and mine-passages go on to this day, as human prospectors move into territory recently held by orcs (and the dwarves grudgingly aid the humans, knowing they'd be swept away without them). Thousands of gems, rough-hewn gold nuggets, and bags of "gold gravel" are said to be hidden up and down the Pass, making it one of the riches areas in all Faerun.

Those trying to dig or explore the Pass, however, are in grave danger of stopping some arrows immediately, then finding themselves the center of a attack from watchful orc bands, dwarven parties, and human guards all converging on them at once—as well as facing the effects of whatever traps the rightful owners of any uncovered cache have left behind!

Among the favorite traps are scything blades that snap across the tops of opened chests to chop off the hands of the inquisitive. Many carry-chests used in the Vast open from the bottom only, the top being a series of elaborate traps. Another popular trap is the two-step poisoned dart gun. Opening the lid fires the first dart; the second is triggered by a treadle on which rests a heavy weight. This weight is the top item inside the chest, and it blocks the way to the rest of the contents. Anyone lifting the weight gets the second dart in the face!

There are no permanent habitations in the Pass, for no one has been able to hire swords enough to turn away the persistent orc attacks that attempts to build here bring. Many traders set out in the summer months from Kurth or King's Reach to establish armed camps for a few days at the summit of the Pass, and they typically sell trapped chests, mules, mining gear, and the like—as well as buying ore or nuggets from those too poor or weak to get it out of the mountains themselves.

A priest of Waukeen used to take in 1,000 gp worth of nuggets in exchange for a *heal* spell; since the fall of that clergy, no priest has yet stepped in to offer the same service in the Pass itself.

Viperstongue Ford

There is no permanent settlement at this frequent battleground, but there is an inn, *The Stag and Viper*, once the headquarters of a famous adventuring band.

The Mistdown Marauders are all long dead, but local legend says that their graves (in the trees north and east of the ford itself) hide cryptic directions to where their treasure lies hidden. The Marauders are thought to have amassed plenty of gems, jewelry, magical armor, and coinage. Some of the Marauders are said to guard the graves as undead, but those unfortunates never knew where the treasure was hidden, so they can't be compelled to reveal its resting place.

Ylraphon

This small port was once an elven city. Overrun by orcs, it became a ruins during their rule. Then the dwarves drove the orcs out of the Vast lowlands and dwelt here for a time. As the most northerly port in the Vast, Ylraphon was important to them. When the kingdom of the dwarves fell, orcs rushed in again and laid waste to the town. So the orcs found themselves living in ruins again.

When humans arrived in the Vast in numbers, the docks of Ylraphon caught the eyes of many, and there was a bloody battle throughout the ruins until all the orcs were dead. From that day to this, Ylraphon has been ruled by a loose council of human merchants.

Recently, local prosperity has been hurt by raids directed by Lashan, who sought to become King of the Dales; the

Time of Troubles, when the orcs came down out of the mountains to do some raiding of their own, and trade was bad all across Faerun; and the rise of Calaunt, whose agents conduct careful murders and intimidation to ensure that Ylraphon never grows to rival Calaunt or harm its trade in any way.

As a result, Ylraphon is struggling today, a town in decline but still popular with independent merchants and with those who want to enter or leave the Vast quietly, avoiding the large cities of the coast. Much gold is spirited out of the area from its docks, but wise captains only cross the Vast to Harrowdale or go up the Lis to Hillsfar, to unload the gold for other ships to take on later voyages. Pirates wait and watch in the Reach for ships putting out from Ylraphon.

The forest is quickly reclaiming northeastern Ylraphon; the ruins there offer shelter to vagabonds and brigands of all sorts. Among the overgrown ruins are several tombs, some of them above-ground stone crypts large enough to shelter a dozen men and their horses. Adventurers come here often hoping to find magic and riches, but Elminster tells me they're wasting their time: the orcs got here first. Unless a desperate brigand has recently stuffed a few coins into a casket while fleeing from treacherous business partners, every tomb has been cleaned out of everything except scattered bones and the occasional undead.

The riches are more likely to lie hidden in the inhabited part of Ylraphon. Local legend whispers that many rich treasures have been buried in Ylraphon over the years by fleeing dwarves, orcs who had to stash booty hurriedly in order to defend themselves, and humans in recent years who couldn't see any way to elude waiting pirates or brigands if they tried to leave Ylraphon laden with bags of gold.

Elminster reminds us that the elves held Ylraphon first, and they almost certainly left treasure behind. The local temple of Selune, the Moonswater, was given several moon-related magical items by departing elves in recent years. Elven treasure here is likely to be jewelry with minor magical powers, or more powerful enchanted weapons, hidden by being magically transformed into stone shapes or encased in stone.

Typical elven jewelry takes the form of necklaces, ornamental bracers, or multiple rings linked with fine chains. Such items might have one of the following powers:

- Cloaks the wearer in shadows at will, giving a 70% chance of hiding in shadows as a thief does (thieves gain a +70% bonus to a maximum chance of 99%)
- Can fire two *magic missiles* per day
- Can *heal* the wearer once every three days
- Can *cure light wounds* twice a day (wearer only)
- Can turn the wearer *invisible* for four rounds, once per day
- Allows the wearer four rounds of *levitation* once per day
- Allows the wearer to move with absolute silence, always *levitating* an inch above the ground or floor, and also confers *feather fall* as needed
- *Blink* once a day for one turn (was intended for use in dancing, and may be accompanied by drifting *dancing lights, faerie fire* bursts, and/or music)
- *fly* once a day at MV 14 (A) for a single three-round period; can lift a maximum of 600 lbs (average human wearer can carry at least one other person of typical human size)
- *Hold person* by touch (single target only, saves at −3, effects as if the spell were cast by a 10th level wizards except that it affects undead and lasts only four round for living beings, eight rounds for undead; broken if "frozen" target takes damage from any attack), once per day
- *Light* once a day (stationary where evoked; does not move with jewelry) and/or *dancing lights* (a cluster of one to four circular balls, hue, size, brightness, and number as the jewelry-wearer wills) once per day; these wink out when desired, or seven rounds after creation, whichever comes first
- *Purify food and drink* once a day, by touch, acting on all chosen items to a total volume limit of no larger than the wearer's own body) that can be touched in a three-round "active" period
- *Spider climb* whenever desired, to a maximum extent of one turn per day
- *Warmth* (as a *ring of warmth*) twice a day for up to six rounds each time (a property often used to walk unclad from house to outhouse on winter nights, or to attend winter parties in very flimsy attire)
- *Water breathing* once per day, for up to one turn
- *Wraithform* once a day, for up to one turn

Elminster says that these minor powers are common to much elven jewelry across Faerun, but he cautions that most elves of rank or power wear jewelry that commands far greater powers.

The elven weapons likely to be encountered in Ylraphon, according to Elminster, are longswords or daggers with various minor powers and bonuses of up to +3. Some may be alignment-oriented, conferring 2d6 electrical damage per contact (or round of continued contact) to all wielders or targets of different alignments.

Chaotic Good and Neutral Good are likely to be favored alignments, with those who are of true Neutral and Lawful Good alignments being allowed to touch and use the weapons without damage. However, people of those alignments are not empowered to use any special blade powers.

Elminster suspects that many such treasures sleep within the walls, chimneys, and roofs of buildings near the docks in Ylraphon. He cautions against searching the harbor or coastal shallows for treasure. Many searchers have scoured such areas already.

There are also persistent local tales of ghostly activities—or even reoccupations—by living worshippers of ruined temples of Gruumsh, Moander, and Bane just north of Ylraphon, in the boggy woods leading into the Flooded Forest.

Certainly bands of evil men and orcs often provision in Ylraphon before plunging north into the woods; many locals suspect they use the ruined temples—which tend to be raised areas in the heart of the swamp—only as places to store treasure.

An adventuring band from Turmish, The Six Spiked Rings, recently came to Ylraphon to investigate one such temple: the fallen House of Moander. They were beset by a Greater Darktentacles (an awesomely powerful version of the monster detailed in the *Ruins of Undermountain* boxed set) that laired in the temple. However, a few of them escaped with two large bags of gems—and the power to guard them, too.

More treasure obviously lies in these temples. And there are, of course, wilder tales of the depths of the Flooded Forest, of entire half-sunken cities, circles of spellcasting giant frogs, and worse.

And with those happy visions ends our treasure tour of the Vast. Elminster advised me dryly to stand clear of the gates of Ravens Bluff for the next little while, to avoid the stampede.

❑

A Fool's Errand

The Viper Comes To Ravens Bluff

by James Tillman

Two figures stood on the purple dune, facing the waning eastern sun as its last rays added their orange luminence to the darkening sky. Swathed in dull robes from head to foot. One of them, the shorter of the pair, continually spat out mouthfuls of dust, even though his face was almost completely covered. The Smiling Viper, infamous swordsman and rogue, wondered once again why he had returned here.

Certainly he had enough of Raurin, with its oppressive head, desert wyrms, sand storms, and dervishes. Yet here he was, once again among the dust and bones of this dry, ancient land.

"Well, it was your idea to follow him here," snapped a familiar yet intrusive voice in the Viper's mind. "Even after I told you the folly of this errand!"

"Kirquare speaks truly," interjected another voice, this one feminine. "We know that none ever has been able to control a skriaxit. And calling them here to test some spell is pure folly. Have you forgotten our encounter with them near the Raurin Alta?"

The Viper glared down at the sources of these complaints—his ever-faithful, if ever-annoying, sentient sabre and main gauche, Kirquare and Tinris. "No, I haven't forgotten," the Viper retorted mentally. "Besides, that was months ago, and we were alone. My faith in Mempter is strong." He shot a glance at the second swathed figure. The Viper always assumed that his companion was human, but he couldn't even say that much about Mempter. But he did trust the mage . . . for whatever reason, he could not say.

"If anyone can fulfil this 'fool's errand,' it is he." At this the Viper left off the telepathic debate to appraise his companion. Mempter stood, as he had for the past quarter-hour, gazing toward the horizon with arms folded. He seemed unaffected by the winds and dust of the plain. His piercing eyes stood out from his tanned face like blue sapphires on a tawny field. At his feet burned a brazier, the wind-swept smoke smelling sweet and pungent even in the harsh wind.

The Viper strode over to Mempter, pausing a moment before speaking. "How goes it?" he asked. But Mempter looked not toward the Viper but up at the red sky. the sun had set, and dark clouds mingled with the fading daylight.

"It comes, Fealor," answered the mage, pointing toward the east. "Look."

On the horizon crawled a great sandstorm, a thick column of purple dust and wind. It came quickly and steadily toward the men. "The summoning has worked," stated Mempter. "Now comes the time to test the remainder of the spell. Be ready, Fealor."

The Viper's hands strayed to the hilts of his weapons, and he pointedly ignored their continued tirade about fools' errands and suicidal missions. Awaiting the arrival of the skriaxit, the Viper glanced about the surrounding plain, and then he saw them.

"Pardon me, Mempter, but . . ."

"I see them," said Mempter. From all directions came more skriaxit, while the first was already uncomfortably close. "It seems an error has occurred," muttered Mempter resignedly. The Viper drew Kirquare and Tinris from their scabbards, a chorus of 'I told you so' ringing in his mind. Meanwhile, Mempter extracted a circular mirrored lens and a small bag. He quickly emptied the contents of the bag onto the lens, the first skriaxit mere yards away. Bending to protect his hands from the winds, he murmured seemingly to himself and passed his open hand over the lens, now covered with diamond dust. With a quick motion, he tossed both lens and dust above him and the Viper.

The lens rose and spun, glowing brightly as it scattered the diamond dust to settle in a large, dome-like shelter around the two figures. As the last of the dust fell to the sand below, the lens vanished, leaving the protective dome shimmering in the sandy winds.

And then the skriaxit were upon them. But as they whirled in, they collided with the invisible barrier of Mempter's spell. Raining blow after blow upon the dome, the skriaxit made it to flicker and fade like the light of a guttering candle.

"Thrice cursed Beshaba!" cried Mempter. "The barrier won't hold." Turning to the Viper, he commanded, "Hold them off! The barrier is one-sided, so you may attack them even as they are held back. But be sure to keep yourself behind the shield." Then Mempter turned to cast another spell.

The Viper slashed out beyond the weakening barrier. Several times the driving winds nearly swept his weapons from his grasp, but he held the creatures at bay with Kirquare's and Tinris's keen edges. But then the Viper felt a strong breeze inside the barrier, and he turned to face whatever had breached the barrier.

A small whirlwind rose in the center of the protective dome, its eye growing wide enough to surround both the Viper and Mempter. At first he though it one of the skriaxit, but then he saw Mempter's gestures and saw that the thing was under the mage's control. A crackling noise snapped his attention back to the barrier—it was giving way.

"Into the cyclone!" shouted Mempter above the roaring winds. "Quickly!"

Without hesitation, the Viper complied. Mempter was already inside the cyclone, and when the Viper was safely beside him, he made a flourishing gesture, and the cyclone rose to the top of the dying dome. In one hand Mempter held a huge gem, and the Viper wondered for a second at its purpose. But then, with a dying, droning sound, the barrier finally failed.

The skriaxit attacked swiftly, sand and dust lashing at the Viper's clothes. The full brunt of their power seemed dampened by the force of Mempter's spell. Even through the blinding sand, the Viper could see that he and Mempter were completely encompassed by black, boiling clouds outside the cyclone—the skriaxit surrounded them completely. Bright points of light continually flashed within the dark clouds, threatening and angry.

"What now?" asked the Viper. Mempter ignored him, raising his arms as if to defy the black storms which trapped the pair. Still clutched in his hand, the gem pulsed with a piercing white light.

"Lamere, remat, remise!" cried the

mage, his face lit wildly by the radiance of his gem. The Viper felt a mighty gust of wind surge through the walls of the cyclone as the black clouds rushed in toward the gem! But no, he realized—the gem was trapping them. Dreadful wails rose all around him as the black storms were drawn into the pulsing gem in a great spiral. The wails mingled with the shrieking winds, a horrid duet of terror and violence.

And all at once the clouds were gone, the night sky wide and open above the broad sands. Clutching the gem, Mempter gestured, and the cyclone slowly lowered the two men to the sand.

The Viper let out a full sigh of relief as he gazed about the becalmed desert. He looked over at Mempter, who was dusting himself off, the gem now hidden in the mage's robes.

"What will you do with them?"

"There is a way to control them; there must be. And I will find it, eventually, with the help of these." He patted his robe and the gem inside.

"And so our fool's errand was not for nothing," smiled the Viper, glancing down at his now-silent weapons. "And we can make a path to the second stop of our journey."

"Of course," replied Mempter. "The Happy Stein it is."

Mempter

20th Level Human (?) Male Elementalist

STR: 10
DEX: 17
CON: 17
INT: 20
WIS: 17
CHR: 16
AC: −5
Hit Points: 50
Alignment: Neutral Good
Languages: Common, Alzhedo, Thorass, Djinni, Jann, Marid, Semphari, Haoou (aerial servant), Sshai (invisible stalker), Wahaauri (wind walker), Ssshiiaah (air elemental)
Nonweapon proficiencies: Ancient history (19), astrology (20), gem cutting (18), herbalism (20), languages, ancient (20), reading/writing (21), religion (18), spellcraft (18), riding, airborne (18), weather sense (17), languages, modern (20)

Magical items: *sack of conjuration focusing* (can perform the following abilities by Mempter's casting another spell of equal level in its place [see "Good Stuff, for a Spell" in DRAGON® Magazine issue #111 for more details]: *find familiar, mount, unseen servant, summon swarm, monster summoning I-VI, phantom steed, conjure elemental, Mordenkainen's faithful hound, summon shadow, conjur animals, invisible stalker, aerial servant, aerial gate; wand of frost, greenstone amulet, brooch of shielding* (43 charges), *crystal ball with ESP, ring of Midnight* (as *ring of Boccob), djinni ring, iron flask, pouch of accesibility, bracers of defense AC 2, cloak of protection +4*
Wizard spells/day: 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 4
Special abilities: *control winds and weather* (1/day), *whirlwind* (2/day), *fly* (24, MC A), *conjure air elemental* (3/day)

Mempter stands exactly 6' in height and is of medium build. He has handsome, noble features with a peppered moustache and goatee. His darkly complexioned skin contrasts strikingly with his piercing blue eyes. He is, as are many of his level, aloof and condescending to those of lesser power.

Mempter's origins are a mystery, though some sages have tied him to the Djen—a race of humanoids who ruled the region that is now Calimshan nearly 6,000 years ago. Mempter is the foremost expert in the area of magic known as aeromancy (magic dealing with air) in the known Realms, and he currently resides in Ravens Bluff, though he spends far more time afield than at home.

Mempter will fabricate magical items for the right fee (usually magical items he desires) and is knowledgable of all known spells in the Realms, excepting those that deal with the elemental forces of fire, water, or earth. His principal foes are the Red Wizards of Thay, Hodkamset (one of the Fangs of Set; see FR10, Old Empires), and Velsharoon (see POLYHEDRON® Newszine issue #55).

New Spells

Mempter's Barrier
(Evocation)
Level: 6
Components: V,S,M
Range: 60 yards
Casting time: 6
Duration: 2 turns + 2 rounds/level
Save: none
Area of Effect: up to 10 foot square/level of caster

This spell is similar to the 5th level spell, *wall of force,* except a barrier is oddly one-dimensional—it prevents things from coming in, but not from going out. It allows those protected behind or inside the barrier to attack those beyond, yet still prevents the outsiders' attacks from coming in.

The barrier can be brought down by the same means that destroy a *wall of force.*

The material component is 5,000 gp worth of powerded diamond and a mirrored lens.

Cyclone Chariot
(Conjuration)
Level: 7
Range: 0
Components: V,S
Duration: 1 round/level
Casting time: 7
Area of effect: special
Save: special

This spell calls forth a whirlwind-like force of great strength. The chariot forms beneath the feet of the wizard and up to eight other man-sized creatures, lifting them up to a height no greater than 20 feet. From there, the wizard mentally controls the chariot, moving in any direction desired at a rate of 48″, as long as the terrain is relatively flat and open. Across mountainous or rough terrain, movement is reduced to 18″; in woodland terrain, movement slows to 12″. The chariot may also cross such obstacles as pits, chasms, ravines, bodies of water, and so forth, by means of temporary flight, floating level with the last solid survace it touched until reaching solid ground again.

The chariot is an effective weapon also. Any being caught in its path suffers 2d10 points of damage (the chariot strikes as a monster with hit

dice equal to the caster's level). Any being hit must save vs. paralysis or be drawn into the chariot, be buffeted for 1d4 rounds (1d8 damage/round), and be thrown 10d10 feet in a random direction (1d3 damage/10 feet).

Upon impact, that being must save again or be stunned for 2d4 rounds. Up to two beings of hill giant size can be drawn into the chariot. Any missile weapon lighter than a boulder is blown aside (*magic missile* and related spells are not considered missiles for this effect and are not repelled), and all other physical attacks are penalized −3 to hit (the chariot itself is immune to physical attack).

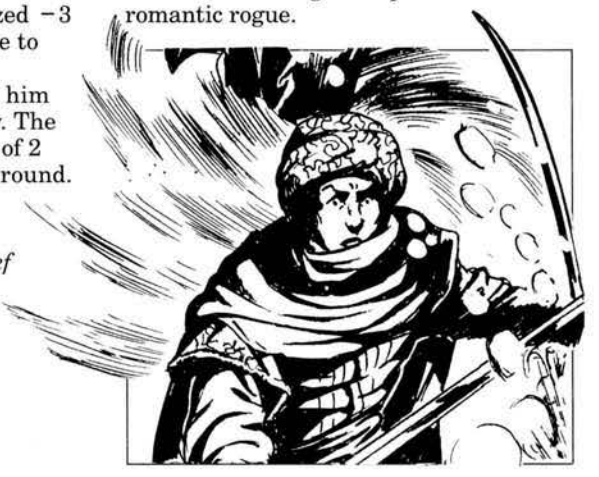
The spellcaster and others with him or her can attack without penalty. The chariot can inflict the equivalent of 2 points of structural damage each round.

The Smiling Viper

12th/15th/12th Fighter/Mage/Thief
Moon Elf Male

STR: 17
DEX: 19
CON: 16
INT: 18
WIS: 13
CHR: 18
AC: −3
Hit Points: 65
Alignment: Chaotic Neutral
Languages: Common, Espruar, Orcish, Thorass, Dethek, Halfling, Goblin, Mulhorandi, Hobgoblin, Gnoll, Undercommon, Thieves' Cant, The Silent Tongue (drow)
Weapon proficiencies: Blades (broad group), bows (tight group), specialized in one and two-weapon fighting styles, dagger/dirk, martial arts
Nonweapon proficiencies: Riding, land-based (16), astrology (18), spellcraft (16), disguise (17), jumping (17), blind-fighting, tumbling (19), running (10), survival (18), tracking (13)
Magical items: *Bracers of defense AC 2, ring of regeneration, ring of invisibility, amulet of proof against detection and location, bag of holding* (250 cubic feet, 1,500 lbs), *dagger of throwing +3* (Waspsting), and Kirquare and Tinris.
Thief Abilities: PP: 70; OL 85; FT 85; MS 80; HS 85; DN 75; CW 95; RL 55
Spells/Day: 5 5 5 5 5 2 1

The Viper's true appearance is often difficult to ascertain, as he is a master of disquise and can take on virtually any appearance. The most reliable description of him is that he is a moon elf about 5' 4" tall with a slender, graceful build. His rather unintimidating appearance conceals his great strength and, coupled with his phenominal dexterity, has caused many opponents to underestimate him. The Viper is handsome, with shoulder-length blond hair, piercing violet eyes, and a deeply tanned complexion. He is known as quite a ladies' man, and he is often seen in rich and fanciful garments, further enhancing his reputation as a romantic rogue.



The Viper's mannerisms and ideals can be summed up in one of his more famous sayings: "Laws are for those who simply aren't clever enough to get around them."

The legend of the Smiling Viper is one that has endured for decades, leading some to believe that his identity has been adopted by a succession of elves over the years. More learned individuals, such as Elminster, know the Smiling Viper of today is the same as the one of hundreds of years ago. The Viper's many adventures have taken him through and far beyond the Realms as most know them.

It is said that no trap nor defense can thwart him, and he has a list of enemies as long as the Dragonwall. Many of them, however, do not realize until too late that the Viper is also a powerful mage, since he is known almost entirely for his physical prowess.

Nevertheless, the Viper has a great thirst for knowledge, especially arcane lore, and has collected a library to make any sage envious. He always has a number of powerful magical items on his person, but the two he is never without are his sentient blades, Kirquare and Tinris.

Kirquare and Tinris: These blades are of ancient manufacture, older even than their current owner. Their creator is unknown, but they have appeared several times since the dawn of elven history, including in a legend claiming they were once wielded by Eldron Collodae, a well known avatar of Erevan Ilesere (god of thieves). How they came to be in the Viper's possession is unknown.

The blades are similar in appearance and style, though one is a sabre and the other a main gauche. Both are made of everbright steel, constructed with cunningly-wrought basket hilts of strands forming images of idyllic woodland scenes, extending from the quillians to the pommel. The grips are covered in supple red leather and seem impervious to stains or wear. The pommels are adorned with the head of a laughing faerie, whose tongue protrudes from its mouth. It is this appendage that forms the hilt before finally wrapping about the base of the blade.

When used together, Kirquare and Tinris give their wielder the benefits of weapons of speed. Their other powers are as follows:

Kirquare (Fistcleaver in Espruar) is a Syrar's *silver sabre +4* (see FR4, The Magister, page 60) of chaotic neutral alignment with an Intelligence of 17 and Ego of 24. He can communicate through speech or telepathy, always in a masculine voice, and can read any language, magical writing, or map. Kirquare can *detect invisibility* and traps within 10 feet of himself; *locate object* in a 120-feet radius; *detect gems,* number, and kind; and *detect precious metals,* kind and amount (20'radius); *find the path* (3/day); and can cast *telekinesis* (250 lb, 2/day).

Tinris (Glitteredges) is a main-gauche skewering (see The Rogues Gallery, page 48). She is identical to Kirquare in all respects except size (and of course damage and special powers). Tinris can *detect magic* (10'r), *detect good/evil* (10'r), *teleport* (600 lbs, 1/day, activation time 2); *clairaudience* (20' range, 3/day), and *spellbending.* The spellbending ability allows The Viper to make a save vs. magic to deflect any spell cast directly at him. the deflected spell rebounds in a random direction (use the grenade-like missiles scatter chart on page 63 of the DUNGEON MASTER™ Guide). If Tinris reflects or tries to reflect a spell, she can be used for no other ability or attack that round.

The Living City

Underdeveloped Real Estate: Tower Aqueduct

James Patrick Buchanan

Even with a huge jump in population, Ravens Bluff still has many underdeveloped land parcels in and around the city. Player characters can discover the location, size, and asking price for each lot of land for sale through word of mouth, public bulletin boards, and sandwich board advertisers. These underdeveloped land parcels can be anything from level plots of land with good access to city streets, to swamps that must be filled in before the PCs can build on them.

One of the more unusual land parcels currently up for sale is commonly known as the Tower Aqueduct. The Tower Aqueduct gets its name from a 50-year-old pirate watch tower which sits upon an ancient and deteriorating, multi-arch aqueduct that predates the fall of Sarbreen. Half of the aqueduct's arches have collapsed, but all of the overbuilt supporting columns still stand.

The aqueduct itself is 14 feet wide, 100 feet high, and 750 feet long. The distance from the hillside to the end of the first column is 100 feet. This is where the PCs will find the fire-gutted stone shell with a 10 feet diameter base and 40 feet high walls. In the stone walls are square sockets containing bits of burnt wood.

If the PCs ask about the tower's history, sooner or latter they will get this information: 50 years ago, the tower was built by two pirate captains who had their shipmates watch the comings and goings of merchant ships in the harbor. But it was hastily abandoned after Charles O'Kane became Lord Mayor. Two years ago, all of the tower's wooden structures—including the floors, roof, and staircase—were burned when it was struck by lightning.

The aqueduct's water channel is 8′x8′. If the PCs examine this channel, they will discover the walls, floor, and roof are made of two distinct layers. Two-and-a-half feet of cut stone make up the outside layer, while six inches of a strange, flexible cement make up the inside layer.

One section of the water channel was built atop the arches. The other section is 200 feet long, built at ground level, and is half-buried in the earth. This section curves to the left, hugging the base of a small hill while slopping gently upward, until it ends above a fast-moving stream. The ruins of a stone dam and two locks still can be seen among the vegetation. The aqueduct itself is always dry, except during spring floods when the stream overflows its banks and rises into the channel.

A short Adventure for the Tower Aqueduct

Players' Information:

The Tower Aqueduct is currently owned by Lord Chancellor Tordon Sureblade, who would like to sell it to an upright citizen for 15,000 gold coins. However, as Tordon has received reports that bandits and monsters may be using his aqueduct as a daytime lair, he has posted this hand-written announcement:

Wanted for hire: experienced adventurers. Make an appointment with the legal clerks at city hall for an interview.—Tordon Sureblade

The PCs find that the clerks are tired and busy, overworked by the city bureaucracy. If the player characters are polite to the clerks, making an appointment for an interview the next day should be easy. If the PCs are impolite, the clerks will make sure the PCs go through a number of bureaucratic hurdles that should test their patience—such as making them fill out a bewildering number of complex forms.

The next day, the player characters are allowed to enter Sureblade's office.

> "During the past two weeks, several citizens of Ravens Bluff have told me that they have seen what they think are bandits or even monsters entering both ends of the aqueduct before sunrise. Then, at sunset, the same rogues and monsters leave the aqueduct. These sightings might be mistaken, since they were made at a distance and in the gloom of twilight.
>
> "I cannot use the city guard to put a 24-hour watch on my own property. The law clearly states that I cannot use city resources for my own advantage. Also, I have searched the area myself and have found no trace of bandits or monsters.
>
> "Still, I must be sure. There are quite a few wanted felons at large, and if they are using the tower aqueduct as a hide-out, that would explain why we haven't been able to find them. And I need to guarantee that my property is clear of any hazards before I sell it. Thus, I wish to hire you to watch my property for several nights and root out any criminals who may be using it as a hide-out. I will pay you 25 gold coins each for every night you keep watch on my land. In addition, I will pay a 50 gold coin bonus for each monster or bandit you capture or dispatch. Do we have an agreement?"

If the PCs agree, Sureblade gives the party a written contract to sign, as well as a simple map of his property to help them plan their tactics. Before the player characters leave Sureblade's office, he will give each party member a *potion of healing*.

DM™ Information

Indeed, the tower aqueduct is being used as a hostel for both humans and monsters. The hostel, called *The Stash and Crash Inn,*" is owned and operated by the partnership of Xenia, a blue weredragon, and Alva, a werespider. As the inn is very profitable, both women can afford a luxurious lifestyle. Xenia and Alva have never transformed in front of the Inn's guests, and only they know that each is a lycanthrope.

Though they themselves are not directly involved in their customers' crimes, Xenia and Alva are guilty of running an unlicensed inn, failing to pay city taxes, and harboring criminals.

Xenia

8th-Level Female Blue Weredragon Fighter

STR: 18/40
INT: 14
WIS: 10
DEX: 17
CON: 15
CHA: 16
AC: 7/0
Hit Points: 46
Alignment: Lawful Evil
Languages: Common
Age: 24
Height: 6' 3"
Weight: 270 lbs
Hair/Eyes: Brown/blue

Weapon Proficiencies: Battle axe (specialized), long bow, longsword
Nonweapon Proficiencies: Direction sense, endurance (14), land-based riding (12), running

Magical Items: *Battle axe +2, long bow +2, potion of invisibility*

In human form, Xenia is a full-figured young woman with beautifully sculpted muscles. She wears loose-fitting, but fine silk clothes and leather boots. Xenia never leaves her room without her battle axe, long bow, and 20 arrows. In dragon form she is a humanoid blue dragon with scales, fangs, claws, wings, and a long tail. In melee, Xenia prefers to fight with her battle axe. Only as a last resort will she use her claw, claw, bite attack for 1d6/1d6/1d6 points of damage. In addition, Xenia can use her dragon's breath weapon once each day, inflicting 8d8+4 points of damage. (See FR7 *Hall of Heroes*, pages 36-37 for more information on weredragons and werespiders).

Xenia was one of five children born into a family of messengers and couriers in the Dalelands. Six years ago, Xenia was ambushed by bandits. During the battle, she suddenly transformed into a weredragon and easily dispatched her foes. Fearing that adventurers would discover her curse and kill her, Xenia immigrated to Ravens Bluff and hoped to disappear in the city's large population.

Somewhere in the city's darkest corners, Xenia met Alva under circumstances neither has since discussed. After getting to understand each other, Alva offered Xenia a full partnership at "The Stash and Crash Inn." Xenia would became the inn's manager, and her duties would include stopping the guests from fighting among themselves, keeping the guests from wrecking the spartan furnishings, and supervising the goblin guards. Xenia accepted, seeing many advantages to a stable life. So far, she has handled even the most stubborn of bandits just by talking tough while flipping her battle axe from one hand to the another.

Alva

8th-Level Female Werespider Wizard

STR: 12
INT: 17
WIS: 14
DEX: 16
CON: 11
CHA: 13
AC: 6/4
Hit Points: 40
Alignment: Neutral Evil
Languages: Common
Age: 31
Height: 5' 5"
Weight: 125 lbs
Hair/Eyes: Black/Hazel

Weapon Proficiencies: Club, dart, quarterstaff, sling

Nonweapon Proficiencies: Ancient history (16), local history (17), rope use (14), spellcraft, swimming, weaving (18)

Magic Items: *Quarterstaff +2, ring of protection +2, potion of gaseous form, potion of extra healing,* four *darts of homing*
Spells/day: 4 3 3 2
Spellbook: Level One: *Affect normal fires, armor, charm person, read magic, shield, sleep, Tenser's floating disc, unseen servant;* level two: *blur, detect good, flaming sphere, magic mouth, mirror image, web, wizard lock;* level three: *blink, dispel magic, suggestion, tongues;* level four: *dimension door, plant growth, wall of ice*

Alva is a tall, attractive female human who wears leather boots, cotton trousers, a short tunic, gloves, and a fox fur trimmed cape. Further, Alva always wears an expressionless face, even in the heat of battle. In spider form she becomes a six-foot long spider with a black-and-yellow striped body.

Alva was born in the Pirate Isles to a family of wizards. Alva's parents began training her in the Art while she was still a child. However, in her teens Alva discovered her lycanthropy, which she kept hidden while building up her skills as a wizard. Five years ago, a group of minor pirate captains asked Alva to be their spy within the Living City. Alva agreed, as this would let her build up her knowledge and personal wealth.

One day, Alva was exploring the peaks southeast of the city when she discovered a tunnel concealed by thick vegetation and an illusionary wall. Behind the illusion was a brass door leading into a series of chambers under Crow's End. After studying the few written records that remained, Alva understood that these chambers were built as a deep underground bunker for Sarbreen's royal family, and she was able to understand how the *teleport* gate worked.

Equally important, Alva also discovered the existence of the For-Rest Inn (see POLYHEDRON® Newszine issue #49). Alva decided that if a dryad could run an inn for forest creatures, she could run an inn for bandits and monsters who would pay a great deal in information and coin to get a safe place to sleep and store their ill-gotten wealth.

Alva realized that she needed a partner powerful enough to keep the guests from robbing and killing each other, lowering her own profit margin. Somehow, Alva and Xenia found each other and became partners out of mutual respect for each others' abilities.

In a battle, Alva will fight from a distance, targeting the party's spell casters. If cornered, she drinks her *potion of gaseous form* and escapes by flying up the tunnel in area 13. If Alva can get the party to retreat through the teleport gate, she will immediately move the first gate to another location. She has a copy of her spellbooks in her room and another set hidden inside the remains of a windmill that is one day's ride south of Ravens Bluff.

The inn has 24 goblin guards. All the goblins dress in warm clothing, as it is cool in the caverns. The goblins will fight to protect the inn and their cushy jobs until their morale fails.

Consult the numbered map as the player characters move into *The Stash and Crash Inn*. The Inn itself is located 100 feet below Crow's End.

1. Both inn guests and the player characters must enter and exit via a two-way limited teleport gate (see

details at the end of this module). Somehow, the player characters must get both the command words and the present location to the gate. One way of getting the command words is to wait near the aqueduct and surprise inn guests as they arrive or leave. Once someone says "I desire sanctuary" within 25 feet of the phantom gate, the gate's outline will glow with a faint blue light and will remain open three rounds, then remain inactive for three more rounds. Anyone moving through the gate will be transported to area two.

DM's Information: The inn's only exits are in areas 2 and 13. These caverns were carved into a thick layer of limestone. The chambers are dry, cold, and illuminated with *continual light* spells. Anyone attempting to climb the walls will find them rough with ledges. The ceilings are 40-feet high and give plenty of room for flying creatures.

2. If the player characters move through the phantom gate in area 1, they will find themselves here. Behind the party is a large mirror. In front of the party is a 10-feet wide by 60-feet long corridor that is well lit by six *continual lights* located on the walls. This entire corridor can be seen by the goblin guards in area 3. If the player characters act hostile, such as charging with weapons drawn, the goblin guards in area 3 will ring the bell, bringing in reinforcements from area 5.

3. This circular room is 100 feet in diameter.

A. Blocks of Skystone (The Horde Boxed set, page 47-49) form a crystal clear rock wall two-feet thick and 10-feet high. This wall allows guards a chance to delay an attacker long enough to organize a defense.

B. This portcullis is protected by a *magic mouth* that will shout "Alarm!" if anyone other than the goblin guards, Xenia, or Alva pass through the gate without paying. Another *magic mouth* will shout "Alarm! Alarm!" if anyone climbs or flies over the crystal wall.

C. Here are a table and chairs for the goblin guards who keep the portcullis closed until guests have paid for their room. The cost to rent a room is five gold coins per person per night.

D. There are six goblin guards stationed here at any one time. Mostly the goblins sit around a table, playing a lively card game and drinking beer. However, the goblins have a ongoing wager to see who among them can be the first to spot incoming guests. As coins are exchanged each time a guest arrives, the goblins are alert for anyone entering through the teleport gate.

First Shift Goblins: AC 6; MV 6″; HD 1-1; hp 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1; AT 1; Dmg by weapon type; AL LE; ML 14. These goblins wear scale mail and carry short swords.

E. Alarm bell

F. This area is a four-feet deep pit completely filled with brown soil. Growing in the soil are various mushrooms, as well as exotic subterranean herbs and spices. At the game master's option, some or all of the herbs and spices are especially valuable.

4. This sleeping chamber is currently unoccupied, its door unlocked and open. All these rooms have 12 crude beds, 12 copper chamber pots, and three wooden wash basins.

5. This sleeping chamber holds the second shift and is the first shift's quarters.

Second Shift Goblins: AC 6; MV 6″; HD 1-1; hp 3, 1, 4, 1, 7, 5; AT 1; Dmg by weapon type; AL LE; ML 14. These goblins wear scale mail and carry short bows and short swords.

6. This sleeping chamber holds one dozen goblin guards who make up the

third and forth shifts.

Third and Forth Shift Goblins: AC 6; MV 6"; HD 1-1; hp 6, 1, 2, 1, 4, 3, 6, 4, 2, 1, 3, 7; AT 1; Dmg by weapon type; AL LE; ML 14. These goblins wear scale mail and carry short bows and short swords.

7. This sleeping chamber currently is *wizard locked* at 10th level by a dual-classed wizard/rogue who has left the city on business. In one corner is a large wooden chest, also *wizard locked* at 10th level. Inside are many three-inch high silver figures once used by Lord Marshal Gaius Varro to plan his battles. The entire collection is worth 6,000 gold coins, while Gaius Varro will pay a 600 gold coin reward upon the return of his military figures.

8. The DM can populate these sleeping chambers with any number of antagonists. Remember: most guests will voluntarily leave the inn if a group of powerful adventurers asks them to.

9. This wooden door has been magically altered to open and close for Alva and Xenia. During Alva's initial search, she found both the magic door and a scroll, with a special 4th level spell that lets her choose who can pass through it and who cannot. This door is effectively *wizard locked* at 12th level.

10. These tunnels are 15 feet high and 15 feet wide.

11. Alva's personal chambers. The items that would interest the player characters are a number of huge webs on the walls, two looms, dozens of seed sacks used for the garden, a copy of Alva's spellbooks, jars full of spell components, a *wand of magic detection* with five chares left, a scroll that permits a 7th or higher level wizard to control who can use the magic door in area 9, and an enchanted writing desk that kills any bookworms that come in contact with it.

12. Xenia's personal chambers. In the center of this chamber is a pile of 10 platinum coins, 200 gold coins, 700 silver coins, and 1,000 copper coins. There are also boxes for extra clothing, a hand mirror, a hair brush, and two dumbbells.

13. Cut into the rock are three pools of water.

A: The water in this pool is near freezing. Fresh food, kept inside waterproof barrels, is preserved here.

B: This water hovers around 90 degrees and is used by Alva and Xenia as a hot bath.

C: The water in this pool is boiling water, and Alva and Xenia use it to cook hot meals for themselves. Anyone in this water will suffer 1d6 points of damage per round.

D: This is a 12-feet high by 15-feet long stack of both full and empty beer barrels. The barrels are five feet from the wall and conceal the illusionary wall in area 14.

14. A permanent illusionary wall hides the opening to a 10-feet wide by 10-feet high escape tunnel. There is also a portcullis that can be lowered by simply knocking out a single supporting beam.

15. Another permanent illusionary wall hides a brass door and the other end of the tunnel from the outside world. This door is enchanted in the same way as the door in area 9.

Experience Award:

Xenia captured or killed: 10,000

Alva captured or killed: 6,000

Each goblin guard captured or killed: 15

Each inn guest captured or killed: Varies

Closing the Stash and Crash Inn and turning it over to the city: 3,000

The city government will be grateful to the player characters for closing down the Stash and Crash Inn. Each PC will be rewarded with 1,000 gold coins, a lavish banquet, and small tokens of appreciation.

Additional Adventure Ideas for Tower Aqueduct

After the player characters accumulate some wealth, they might wish to start building their own homes and businesses in Ravens Bluff. The Tower Aqueduct is one of the more unusual land parcels a wealthy player character can buy. After the PCs obtain ownership, they could do at least two things:

Demolish both the tower and the crumbling aqueduct, then build anew.

OR

Rebuild the dam and the locks to get a steady stream of water flowing through the aqueduct. This flowing water could be used to turn three or more overshot water wheels, that in turn could supply mechanical energy to cam shafts. This free energy could be used to run industries such as breweries, hemp mills, oil and silk mills, sugar cane crushers, iron works (forge hammers and blast furnace bellows), tanning mills, sawmills, textile mills, and even weapon sharping stones. Setting up and running a business would be a good for way player characters to make a living in-between adventures.

New Magic Item: *Limited Teleport Gate*

This magic item is an eight-feet by eight-feet mirror set in a brass picture frame. On the left side of the frame, about four feet above the base, is a *crystal ball* that lets Alva move the phantom gate to another location or to close down the gateway. This *crystal ball* has a range of one mile and is fixed into the mirror's frame. It cannot be safely removed without the aid of a blacksmith.

Located in area 2, this large mirror gate can project a phantom gate that allows any number of people to move into and out of the inn unseen. Listed below are a number of facts about the phantom gate.

A: When not in use, the gate can only be seen by a *detect magic* or a similar spell. As it has no physical mass, it cannot be touched in any way. When in use, a faint blue light will outline a six-feet square area and will remain that way for three rounds. Then the gate will close for three more rounds before it can be opened again.

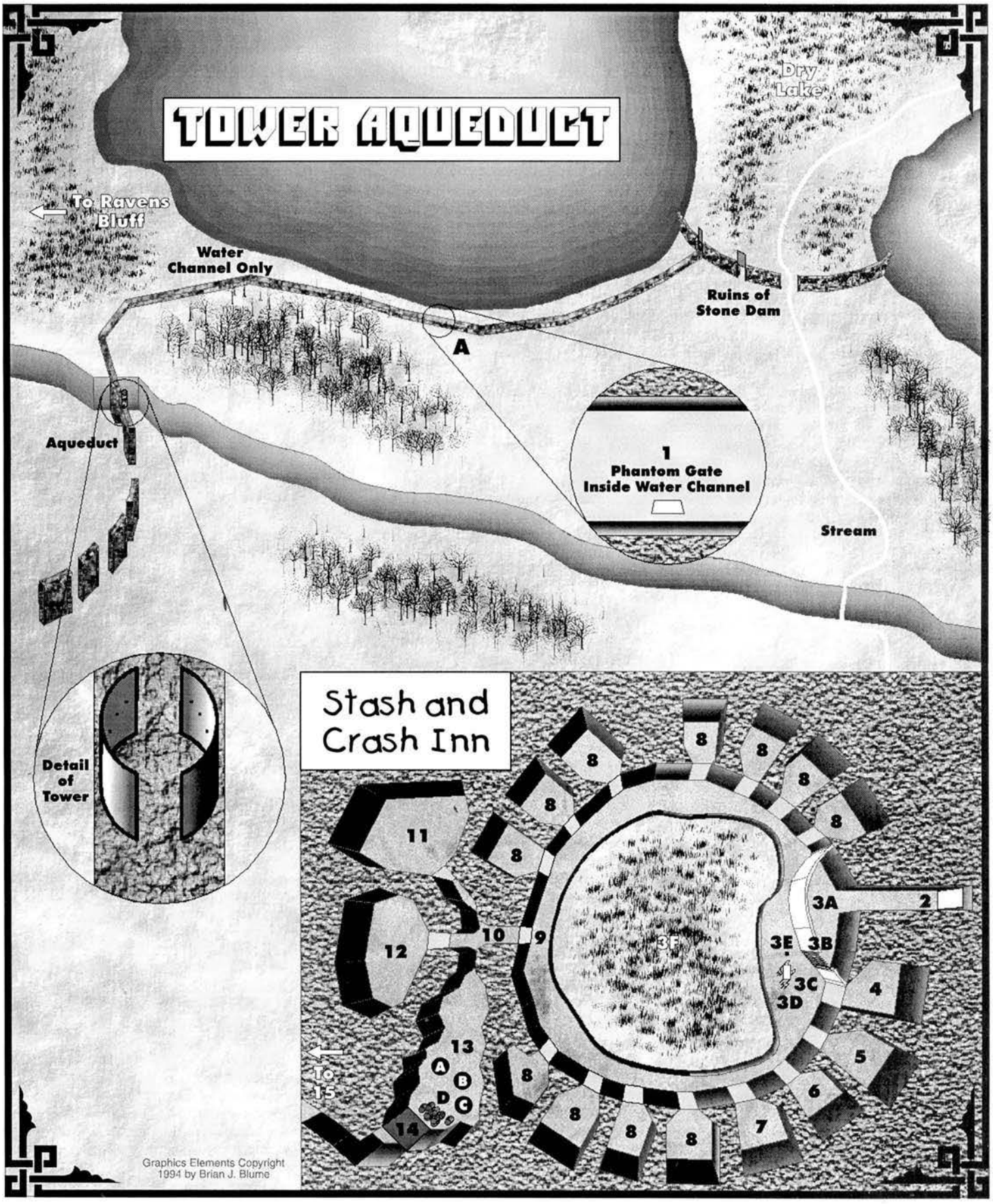
B: The *crystal ball* and mirror have a range of one mile and can reach areas within and around Crow's End.

C: The phantom gate is currently located inside the aqueduct at point A and will remain there for two more days, unless Alva has a reason to move it sooner.

D: The command words for opening the phantom gate are "I desire sanctuary." Anyone moving through the gate will be transported to the mirror's current location. Right now, the mirror is bolted to the rock wall in area 2. However, it can be removed if the player characters have the right tools. If the *crystal ball* is removed, the mirror will cease to function as a teleport gate.

XP Value: 10,000

GP Value: 12,000


TOWER AQUEDUCT
Dry Lake
To Ravens Bluff
Water Channel Only
Ruins of Stone Dam
A
Aqueduct
1
Phantom Gate
Inside Water Channel
Stream
Detail of Tower
Stash and Crash Inn
To 15
Graphics Elements Copyright 1994 by Brian J. Blume

The Living Galaxy

You (And Me) Against The Universe: One-Character Adventures, Part 1

by Roger E. Moore

Lightning from the thunderstorm knocked out the guidance computer as he descended, but Garik Norlund managed to land the small spacecraft on a lake. Still airtight, the ship sank, and Garik was able to shut down the power plant and get out through the airlock. He swam ashore, finding shelter from the driving rain under a rocky overhang. There, he grimly reviewed his situation:

He was being hunted by Glorious Path terrorists for the stolen infochip hidden in his false molar. His ship was intact and full of survival equipment, but it lay at the bottom of a shallow lake in a wilderness area 1,200 kilometers from this low-tech world's only starport. The weather was bad now, but it would get worse as the climate entered the rainy season. His contact at the starport probably believed Garik had died in the explosion aboard space station Tellus-2, which had been held by Path guerillas until Garik sabotaged it during his escape.

Meanwhile, the remnants of the Glorious Path were settling down on this backwater world, forcibly "reeducating" the farmers and herders to accept their new bosses and turn away from the corrupt lackeys of the imperialist galactic government (as GP propaganda put it). Every other cell of the Path had been located and destroyed throughout civilized space—but this group had escaped, and it was well armed and more vicious than a cornered rat.

Garik sighed. It would be a rough walk back to the starport, and the thousand-odd survivors of the Glorious Path would dog him every step of the way—if the wildlife, weather, and disease didn't get him first. If the GP caught him, they would make him beg for death. They were good at that. But if he didn't get back, the Glorious Path would destroy all civilization on this world. It might even turn pirate and attack local space shipping.

Garik leaned back against the rock and smiled humorlessly. The GP would have its work cut out for it. Garik was one of the best commando agents alive. He'd learned every trick in his years with StarForce Intelligence, and he'd invented a few more. If they wanted action, they'd get it.

The Glorious Path had made its last enemy. And that enemy was Garik Norlund.

The ideal role playing session has at least three players, preferably four to six, who interact with one Game Master. In practical terms, this is sometimes hard to manage. I remember times past when I would show up at a friend's home for an evening of role playing, only to discover that the GM and I were the only ones present. Sometimes I was the GM to only one player, who wanted to have a special mission run for his or her character.

Almost any role playing game, adapts well to one-on-one play—one player and one GM. This covers some of the basics for adapting your favorite science fiction role playing game to "one-on-one" play.

Making It Work

Based on my own experience and that of others who have tried one-on-one role playing adventures, I've come up with a few basic observations on what makes such a set-up succeed or fail. These considerations are much more important than issues of how a solo character is generated or what adventures the PC goes on.

1. Closeness and Chemistry: Given that there are only two participants in a one-on-one game, the issue of how well the two get along in real life becomes critical. I know that husband-wife or girlfriend-boyfriend role playing team-ups go on all the time, but I also know that problems encountered in a gaming setting have a nasty way of spilling over into personal relationships.

I think it's best for the GM and player in a one-on-one game to be people who don't live together. Additionally, the two should enjoy each other's company and gaming style. The fit is critical here. Normally, a GM is confronted with several gamers who each have a different gaming style, and the interplay between players gives the GM frequent breaks from interacting with the group. The mix of player gaming styles allows for the chance that some players will mesh with the GM's personal gaming style, reducing any negative effects from gamers with differing styles. The differences in gaming styles also keeps the game play varied and adds "dynamic tension"—that excitement that keeps a campaign going.

In a one-on-one game, however, the dynamic tension rests exclusively on the chemistry between the GM and player; there's no one else's interaction to fall back on when the game gets slow or things don't work out as planned. Make sure that what the player wants to do is pretty much what the GM wants to do. A hack-n-slash gamer would probably not do well with a GM who prefers mystery-solving, and so on. Beyond that, tolerance, creativity, trust, and enthusiasm are required from both player and GM to keep the game lively and fun. If you want to play a one-on-one game, stamp these qualities on your forehead—you'll need them.

2. Sideline plot: Because the one-on-one set-up has the inherent "design flaws" noted above, I would encourage that it be adopted primarily as a side campaign to a "normal" gathering of role players in which both the GM and player of the one-on-one are involved. This may not be possible if the player can't always meet with the rest of the group because of scheduling problems, or the player has game goals or a gaming style that won't mesh with those of the rest of the players. Still, it's something to be considered.

Even if a solo player isn't part of the regular group, he can still take part in the overall campaign. For instance, a scout, thief, or saboteur PC (once part of the main group of PCs) might decide to move deep into enemy territory, maintaining radio silence and informing the others by written messages as to what she's discovered, stolen, or blown up.

Here, an out is provided for the player who can't make the regular game sessions to keep up with the rest of the group. In a different campaign, an adventurer might be called back to his homeworld to assist his family in a fight against marauding bandit gangs. This set-up allows a player who must leave a group over a long time to keep adventuring on his own, perhaps to rejoin the main group someday.

(Note: If a player is leaving a group permanently but wants to keep his

character "in touch," the GM should consider starting a play-by-mail or play-by-modem campaign for him. More information on this is given in DRAGON® issue #197, in the articles "Perils & Postage" and "By Mail or by Modem?")

There may be times when the solo player *can* join the rest of the group (school is out for spring break, etc.). However, if the solo PC is unavailable because it would disrupt the plot too much to pull the PC out of his current adventure, a new and probably temporary PC can be given to the player. Maybe one of the GM's more interesting NPCs will do. (See item #4, however.)

3. Don't ref yourself: This point is a delicate one. I've seen a number of one-on-one or small-group role playing set-ups in which the GM ran adventures in which he had a PC, too. In other words, the GM refereed his own character. This usually happened because the GM wanted to play, too, and it added a little more spark for his interest.

Don't do this! A series of letters in DRAGON Magazine's "Forum" a few years ago discussed the advantages and disadvantages of this style of play, and in my opinion the problems far outweighed any benefits. There is too strong a tendency for a GM to abuse his position as an impartial arbiter, allowing him to make adjustments to the game so that his character more easily reaps the rewards of the adventure.

For example, two PCs (one being the GM's character) are searching the wreckage of a crashed starship. The GM knows from reading the adventure notes—which he might have written himself—that a cache of laser pistols is stored in a bed with a secret compartment under the mattress.

The two PCs are armed with slugthrowers but are almost out of ammo. Which PC is going to find that cache of laser pistols? Is there even any question about the pistols' ultimate discovery?

The GM must always keep in mind that the *player's* character should be the focus of attention of a one-on-one campaign. *The GM is meeting the player's needs, not the other way around.* If the GM wants to role play (and who doesn't?), he can invent some highly intriguing NPCs who interact with the PC but let the player do all of the thinking and work. If a GM doesn't do this, the player will *instantly* detect that the GM is stacking things in favor of his own PC.

Even if the GM tries to be "fair" about it and let the other PC have the lion's share of the treasure that is found, the player will know the GM is fudging with the rules and that the player's own abilities counted little in the adventure. Don't make this mistake.

4. Separate campaigns: If a solo character is generated using the free-for-all guidelines in this article, it probably will be far more powerful than a character generated normally in whatever game system you are using. The player should avoid taking this supercharged hero into a regular campaign, or else he risks seeing his PC overshadow everyone else's. This will please the player, but it won't please anyone else in the group; it's the old "demigod character" problem from fantasy campaigns.

The GM should strictly enforce this ruling unless the solo hero is found to be within the power range of the rest of the group, or the solo hero's strengths and weaknesses complement those of the rest of the party. This last option is tricky but might work. A rich, intellectual detective might find it helpful to have a gang of strong, gun-toting adventurers along for certain missions, and the rowdy adventurers might need someone who could supply clues, hints, and advice for a difficult problem.

In fantasy terms, you might get away with having Conan lead a group of novice wizards, or Gandalf accompanied by a middling bunch of dwarves (as per *The Hobbit*). Don't try it if the most powerful character is being played like a boorish, conceited jerk; if the players can handle it, however, this could be lots of fun.

5. Maturity: This last point may be the most important. You know, in a way it really doesn't matter if a one-on-one campaign reeks of Monty-Haulism, with the solo PC gaining a billion Imperial credits and his own naval fleet, or if the solo PC is flat broke, unarmed, and being chased through a rain forest by savage, carnivorous, culturally challenged aliens. We all know it's the fun that counts. But the maturity displayed by the player and GM determines whether that fun is going to come about.

My definition of maturity involves a number of traits, two of which I'll name here. Perhaps the most important trait is the player's ability to delay gratification. I've known players who became incredibly angry that a treasure hoard did not include exactly the items they were looking for; they'd yell, stamp their feet, and act like eight-year-olds. This is a game, right? You want unpredictability, right? Then learn to live with it; show patience and understanding. If a player wants a predictable game, he can run his own adventures by himself.

The other trait is the GM's ability to satisfy the player. The GM has to be sharp enough to gauge accurately what the player wants out of a scenario, and mature enough to give the player what is wanted. If you know the player really wants her character to be a heroine who's loved by all, then set up the one-on-one campaign that way. Don't deny her the fun she wants. A GM has a zillion ways to make life "interesting" for any player. In order for someone to be a much-loved heroine, she's got to overcome some stiff challenges on her own—and you'll be making them up.

If a player doesn't think he can wait and work toward a goal instead of getting it right away, and if a GM doesn't think he can respond to the player's real wants and needs, then one-on-one adventuring is right out. Don't even bother with it. You be the judge of what you can do.

Now, a few words on how to set up the game.

Solo Man: From The Ground Up

If you were called upon to save the world—*by yourself*—you'd want to be as physically fit, well-informed, well-trained, and well-equipped as you could possibly get. That's the basic goal of creating a stand-alone player character, too. However, no one person can do everything, though you can be very good at a few things, fairly good at a lot of things, and not so good at the rest. This is the model for PCs we'll adopt here. A solo PC must be fairly powerful and well-rounded, but not entirely so. Superman himself was allergic to Kryptonite.

Role Models For All

Speaking of Superman, it would help to focus on a few role models for one-on-one adventurers. Think of these examples of more-or-less solo heroes from the pages of modern fiction

(including pulp novels, TV, fantasy, and comic books): Tarzan, James Bond, Batman, Dirty Harry, Captain America, Conan, Rambo, Alexander Mundy ("It Takes a Thief"), the Executioner, the Avenger, Doc Savage, and the Destroyer. These people are not entirely all-powerful, but they're among the most clever and talented (if not the most powerful) humans of their worlds. Spies, barbarians, lawmen, vigilantes, soldiers, detectives—there are many types of solo heroes around.

Science fiction offers its own assortment of go-it-alone heroes. Among them are: John Carter (lord of Edgar Rice Burroughs' Barsoom), Jaime Retief (the diplomat in Keith Laumer's tales), Slippery Jim DiGriz (Harry Harrison's Stainless Steel Rat), Steve Austin (the "Bionic Man" of Martin Caidin's *Cyborg* and the TV show, "The Six Million Dollar Man"), Paul Janus Finnegan (a.k.a. Kickaha, from Philip José Farmer's World of Tiers novels), Richard Deckard (the android hunter of *Blade Runner*), the Time Traveler (of H. G. Wells' novel), and Gully Foyle (psionic antihero of Alfred Bester's *The Stars My Destination*).

These are remarkable figures, to say the least. Each has many strengths and obviously stands above the ranks of normal humanity. But their adventures are tough, too. Each is constantly challenged by the nature of his opposition, which can be ferocious. Normal people would be quickly overwhelmed and lost in such situations. Heroes, however, can't afford the luxury of dying too soon—especially not in a role playing game!

A careful reader might point out that these characters didn't always travel alone. Conan, for instance, had companions and even armies that followed his adventures, and Captain Nemo (of Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* and *The Mysterious Island*) commanded a ship's crew. Still, all such companions and underlings easily could be made NPCs, as the central focus of these stories is on one character, the hero, and his efforts to overcome tough problems.

A careful reader might also point out that the examples I've named so far have been exclusively white males. The literature is frankly jammed with them, which is unfortunate because it obscures the fact that race and sex (and age and religion) are irrelevant to heroism. Any of the above heroes could have been nonwhite or female. Picture Captain Nemo as a vengeful Taiwanese genius, or a black woman who is an interstellar spy and saboteur on the level of James Bond.

Hunting for examples of solo heroines and nonwhite heroes in novels and film (even mainstream material) is difficult but worthwhile. In Louis L'Armour's *The Last of the Breed,* the fighter pilot who must escape captivity and death in the Soviet Union is a Native American. Black heroes appear in the movies *Passenger 57* and *Beverly Hills Cop*; Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan movies offer Oriental heroes. Emma Peel (Diana Rigg) of the TV show "The Avengers" and Jodie Foster's FBI character in *Silence of the Lambs* are worthy of mention, as is the female lead in the World War II spy movie, *Shining Through*. And how many readers once enjoyed the mystery/detective adventures of Nancy Drew?

Nonwhite and female hero-types are harder to find in the pages and cinema of science fiction. There's Ripley from the *Alien* movies, the "Bionic Woman" of TV fame, and Harry Belafonte's nuclear-survivor character in *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil.* The time-traveler of Wilson Tucker's novel, *The Year of the Quiet Sun,* is also black, and Juan Rico of Robert A. Heinlein's *Starship Troopers* is a Filipino. The "Star Trek" TV shows, in old and new versions, had lots of female and nonwhite characters. There are more examples out there, but you'll have your work cut out for you finding them.

If the GM is willing, there is nothing to prevent a solo PC from being something other than a normal (if powerful) human. The solo PC could just as well be an alien, a mutant human, a cyborg, a robot, or an intelligent starship (as was described in this column in POLYHEDRON® Newszine issues #60-61 and 69). It's your campaign—do what you want with it.

Rigging The Rolls

Generating a character for a series of solo adventures is a challenge in itself. I recommend that the player and GM put their heads together and work out a nonstandard system for PC creation that applies only to solo heroes. Solo PC generation might even be taken on a case-by-case basis, with each new hero being made up in a unique way.

Because the player is alone against the GM's hordes, I think it is best if the player gets a lot of breaks in generating that PC. First, the player should write up a list of what his PC should be able to do. Basic game statistics, skills, equipment, and background should be invented by the player and turned over to the GM for approval. The player should follow the general systems recommended for making PCs for the game in question, but should be free to pick skills that are randomly rolled, or boost scores that come out as low. Fudging die rolls here is perfectly fine; heck, you could drop them entirely and just forge the character as you like.

On the GM's part, however, playability and game balance should be kept in mind. The hero should be tough all around to survive the kinds of threats that the GM is able to amass on a moment's notice, but survival and success should still be a challenge, not an unquestioned expectation. Reasonable players will see that giving a hero maximum statistics in all scores, with all skill levels pushed to their maximums, is not going to produce very interesting role playing. Besides, it looks childish. More mature, secure, but still thrill-seeking types will produce interesting combinations of strengths and weaknesses in their PCs to encourage creative role playing.

Staying In Shape

As a general rule, a solo PC should have good physical game statistics, or else some sort of skills or augmentations that get around physical handicaps. There's good reason, in terms of role playing a character with personality, to give a hero some sort of weakness or flaw (as discussed in this column in issue #63). However, in solo scenarios, it is unlikely that anyone is going to pull the hero's buns out of the fire unless the GM is partial to using *deus ex machina.* Being constantly rescued by friendly forces who "just happen to show up" is damaging to the game in every respect. The hero must pull his own weight. If he's not musclebound, he might have a lightweight, strap-on exoskeleton for performing feats of strength. If he's clumsy, he might compensate by taking his time and relying on highly practiced skills. Serious health problems might be overcome by medicines, equipment, or training. As pointed out earlier, a cybernetic-augmented hero is possible—think of the movie *Robocop* or the "The Bionic Woman."

Serious role players might insist on taking a profound physical handicap just for the sheer challenge of doing it. Picture a spacecraft pilot who has no

legs, or an ex-spy who has lost an arm. How would they handle prolonged exposure to danger? Americans once elected a President who was confined to a wheelchair, and he stayed in office for four terms, even during a World War!

In any event, it is still a good idea to have most physical scores above the norm. Solo comic-book crimefighters like Captain America, the Punisher, Black Widow, or Batman are usually in excellent shape, often near or above Olympic levels. The hero might have one or two unusually high scores, in physical strength or stamina, that will carry him through wilderness survival or escape situations fairly well.

In compensation, the PC might have a negative drawback like an addiction to cigarettes or a less-than-handsome appearance. (The ace pilot of *Firefox,* played by Clint Eastwood, suffered from traumatic flashbacks to his Vietnam War days.)

Quick On The Pickup

Speaking of genius, a solo PC cannot afford to be a dummy, unless you like role playing with a comic touch (sort of like playing a dumb barbarian in fantasy role playing games). I think a solo hero should be of at least above-average intelligence and highly skilled, capable of both detailed planning and rapid improvisation. James Bond wasn't a rocket scientist, but he was extremely clever, ruthless, and talented, and his enemies did not last long!

Some solo heroes can be brilliant inventors, such as Doc Savage or Batman, carrying around special gadgets that catch their foes completely by surprise. Prior planning is good, but on-the-spot invention is often better.

Conan, as low-tech a solo hero as you can get, could produce simple but effective save-the-day devices. James Bond, who was good at jury-rigging traps, weapons, and escape devices, relied on other people (namely Q) to create his high-tech gadgets, but his own skills were often more effective (as in the movie *Never Say Never Again*). McGyver, of TV show fame, was even better at technological jury-rigging, often producing mind-boggling devices in seconds flat. It pays to have brains.

Invention, however, is hard to simulate in games if the player is not particularly clever at thinking up inventions. Skills the player possesses might be incorporated into the PC's profile if they would be useful in game situations. Sharon, who enjoys chemistry and physics, might give her PC similar skills so that the latter can make gunpowder or pulleys when necessary. Ahmed, who loves hiking and camping, might gift his PC with knowledge to live off the land and survive natural disasters.

Powers From Beyond

Certain unusual mental skills, such as perfect recall or savant-like mathematical abilities, would be of great help to solo PCs.

The GM and player must set limitations on these paranormal skills. A balance or trade-off between physical and mental/quasi-magical powers should be found.

Gaveral Rocannon, of Ursula LeGuin's *Rocannon's World,* was a powerful telepath but was probably just above average in physique; Telzey Amberdon, of James Schmitz's science fiction novels, was a fantastic telepath but a normal teenaged girl otherwise. Look at other psychics or wizards in fiction. Could Gandalf have lifted a boulder without magic?

On the other side of the coin, mighty Conan could be said to have had a few minor but useful psionic-like abilities (danger precognition, for instance). A skilled cat burglar might know a few mental tricks from her days among the alien Xhksmnx barbarians. No one can do everything, though a mix of talents, lesser and greater, helps.

Know What You're Doing

A solo PC's occupation must allow for many reasonable skills, some at very high and more at moderate levels. (Many people have commented that thieves are the best characters to play in fantasy role playing games, as their varied skills let them be so independent.) An occupation should also allow for a wide variety of adventures to avoid campaign staleness.

Examples of such occupations would include: explorer, spy, special-mission soldier, military scout, law-enforcement agent, detective, thief, vigilante, bounty hunter, and generic troubleshooter-for hire. A character's job could actually encompass several of these positions, if not more. For instance, a military scout could take part in recon and spy missions, sabotage, thefts of enemy equipment, sniper jobs, wilderness exploration, prisoner rescues, escape attempts, animal hunting, and survival scenarios. A law-enforcement officer with broad legal powers on a colony world could act as an espionage agent, wild-animal hunter, diplomat, military leader, licensed privateer, disaster-survival specialist, helicopter pilot, arms smuggler, and counterterrorist. Keeping the character's general goals clear (e.g., fight crime and protect the colonists) but keeping the methods fairly loose and open is a good idea.

The specific skills the PC acquires should include some combat abilities (in firearms, martial arts, blades, large weapons, or whatever) and equipment-handling talents (driving, piloting, repair, etc.), with knowledge of whatever sciences or studies are appropriate to the character and campaign. Think in broad but reasonable terms here. What kinds of skills did Nick Carter, Solomon Kane, and Robinson Crusoe have?

Does the hero specialize with one or two weapons, like the long bow, combat knife, shotgun, or blaster? What scientific and technical skills does the character have that can be creatively used in the game? What tools does the character need or prefer? Questions like these help build the character the player will be happy with.

Again, it's a good idea to have the solo hero be a Renaissance man or jack-of-most-trades. If this can be done in a logical fashion, all the better. Game balance should be carefully considered by GM and player here, and both should think about which skills will be critical to the success of an adventure or campaign.

A skilled soldier could be a good hunter and a fair vehicle repairman. A bounty hunter could be an amateur artist and know something about computer operations. Logical creativity counts for a lot!

A Trusty Sidekick?

In a solo campaign, I'd avoid sidekicks, but I thought I'd mention them anyway. Pets, robots, and the like are preferable, as long as they are simply managed in the game and generally obey the PC's wishes (unless the GM is being nasty). Anything smarter than a bright dog risks becoming the GM's mouthpiece, allowing too much manipulation to come through. This goes for smart ship's computers, personal computers, and so on. A human or alien sidekick (or a computer as smart as a human) should be role played by another person, which automatically removes the solo-campaign aspect.

But as long as we're on the topic . . .

Continued on page 32

Into The Dark

Quatermass

by James Lowder

In July 1953, the BBC ran the first episode of "The Quatermass Experiment," a six-part serial introducing the character of Professor Bernard Quatermass to the British television audience. The imaginative story, penned by screenwriter Nigel Kneale, captured the public imagination with its strong characters and suspenseful plot.

Three more serials followed the television production of "The Quatermass Experiment:" "Quatermass II" in 1955, "Quatermass and the Pit" in 1958, and "Quatermass" in 1979. Each serial in the quartet also spawned a feature film. The first of these—a 1955 remake of "The Quatermass Experiment"—proved to be an international hit for a small British film company, Hammer Studios. (It would be another two years before Hammer established itself firmly in the horror genre market with *The Curse of Frankenstein*, starring Peter Cushing and a little known actor by the name of Christopher Lee.)

The Quatermass saga didn't end there. The first two feature films were adapted into comics for the 1970s British film magazine *The House of Hammer* (known in later issues as *The Halls of Horror*). Issues eight and nine featured the comics version of *The Quatermass Xperiment*, and issue twenty-three sported an adaptation of *Quatermass II*.

The general appeal of the Quatermass films can be attributed to a number of things, but first and foremost among these are Nigel Kneale's source screenplays. Kneale crafted the Quatermass scripts around science-based mysteries. The fantastic plot elements border on the horrific but deftly avoid gore-mongering or blunt, overstated shocks.

The tone of all four Quatermass tales is quite serious, even bleak. Science proves to be both the enemy of humanity and its potential salvation. Whatever victories the heroes achieve are pyrrhic. And the arch-scientist Quatermass consistently defines himself as an anti-hero, challenging the establishment at the same time he saves the world. In this, Quatermass seems to be at least the spiritual father of another British renegade superscientist—Doctor Who.

The first three Quatermass films appear regularly on late-night cable, though only *The Creeping Unknown* and *The Quatermass Conclusion* are available for video rental. This will likely change for the better quite soon, however, as the rights to the Quatermass films have recently been bought up. A big-budget, big-name director remake of the series is rumored to be in the planning stages, though I honestly can't see what's to be gained in trying to improve on these fine films.

As for the original Quatermass features, they're rated as follows:

You can't get any better	*****
Entertaining and enjoyable	****
There are worse films	***
Wait for cable	**
A waste of good tape	*

The Creeping Unknown

1956, 78 Minutes
Hammer
Director: Val Guest
Cast: Brian Donlevy, Richard Wordsworth, Jack Warner
****

When Hammer Studios turned the successful six-part serial "The Quatermass Experiment" into a feature film, they chose Brian Donlevy for the all-important role of Professor Bernard Quatermass. The decision was—and remains today—somewhat controversial.

In passing over Reginald Tate, the star of the television serial, and opting for an American actor known for his tough-guy roles in films like 1939's *Beau Geste*, the producers turned away from Kneale's original vision of a British and somewhat more sympathetic Quatermass. But Donlevy's portrayal of the good professor as gruff, heartless, and obnoxiously American helps make *The Creeping Unknown* an effectively chilling film.

The Creeping Unknown was originally released in England in 1955 as *The Quatermass Xperiment*; the spelling of the British title emphasized the film's serious, mature tone. (The British X certificate is essentially the same as the American R rating.) Paradoxically, the film is the least mature of the series, at least in subject matter and theme.

A spacecraft designed by Professor Quatermass's Experimental Rocket Group crash-lands in the English countryside. But when the ship is finally opened, Quatermass discovers that only one of the astronauts, Victor Carroon, has survived. The other two astronauts aren't merely dead, they've disappeared except for their still-intact spacesuits.

From this standard sort of "locked room" mystery premise, the story treks steadily into the darker corners of science fiction. With the help of his team at the Rocket Group and Inspector Lomax of Scotland Yard (Jack Warner), Quatermass pieces together the horrifying truth—Carroon has been possessed by an alien lifeform and is mutating into an admixture of plant and animal, a monstrous creature that literally drains the life out of anything it touches.

This man-into-monster plot certainly wasn't groundbreaking (even in 1953), but director Val Guest and cinematographer Walter Harvey gave *The Creeping Unknown* a subdued, documentary-like feel that makes the film quite startling. Donlevy's Quatermass—harsh, unyielding, and incredibly cold—adds an edge to the production, one that is countered brilliantly by Richard Wordsworth's portrayal of the doomed and suffering Victor Carroon. Though his dialogue is confined to grunts and moans, Wordsworth still manages to convey the astronaut's suffering and give it solid emotional impact.

The film also sports an incredibly grim and affecting final scene (which became a sort of trademark with the series). So don't run off into the kitchen for a Dr. Pepper once the monster has been summarily obliterated; you'll be sorry if you miss the final line of dialogue—spoken by Quatermass, of course.

Enemy From Space

1957, 85 Minutes
Hammer
Director: Val Guest
Cast: Brian Donlevy, Michael Ripper, Sidney James
******1/2**

Hammer once again teamed Brian Donlevy with director Val Guest for its adaptation of the 1955 television serial, "Quatermass II." The film was released in England under the same title as the BBC production, but in the United States it's known as *Enemy from Space*.

While investigating some mysterious meteorites, Professor Quatermass and the members of his Experimental Rocket Group uncover some strange goings-on at the secret military installation known as Winnerden Flats. The huge, isolated complex is supposedly developing synthetic food, but Quatermass suspects something far more nefarious. With the help of his old ally from Scotland Yard, Inspector Lomax (this time played by John Longden), the professor uncovers the truth about the place: Winnerden Flats is a beachhead for an invasion by spore-like aliens that can possess human hosts and destroy their will.

Like the similarly themed *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, the second Quatermass story derives much of its tension from the fact that the aliens adopt the appearance of humans. The circle of people Quatermass and Lomax can trust grows smaller and smaller as the story progresses, a dilemma caused partly by sheer paranoia, but also by solidly grounded suspicions that the aliens have infiltrated all levels of British government. As with *The Creeping Unknown*, the sf premise for *Enemy from Space* is not groundbreaking, but it lends itself to a more sophisticated film, one better suited to delicate social commentary and subtle themes than the first Hammer feature.

Enemy from Space also boasts a script adapted from the original work by Nigel Kneale himself. Kneale's touch shows most in the characters. Donlevy's Quatermass retains his edge, but he's softened enough to react with genuine concern when one of the Rocket Group is taken prisoner at Winnerden Flats. Quite an improvement over his hearty disdain for all emotions in the first Hammer outing.

For all its softer characterization and subtle social commentary, *Enemy from Space* manages to be more consistently unsettling than the premiere Quatermass feature. (Watch especially for the scenes where the government minister discovers the true nature of the synthetic food he's been funding and Quatermass gets a glimpse of a tentacled beast that almost qualifies as a Lovecraftian horror.) With its well-tempered pacing and surprising plot twists, *Enemy from Space* will keep you riveted, right down to the film's final grim moments.

Five Million Years to Earth

1968, 97 Minutes
Hammer/Seven Arts
Director: Roy Ward Baker
Cast: James Donald, Andrew Kier, Barbara Shelley
****

It took Hammer almost a decade to adapt the third Quatermass serial—the 1958 BBC production, "Quatermass and the Pit." The feature version saw release in Britain in 1967 with the same title as the BBC serial. Hammer released the film in the United States through 20th Century Fox as *Five Million Years to Earth*.

While extending the London Underground in the Knightsbridge area, beneath an old street known as Hobbs Lane, construction workers stumble across some quite ancient skeletal remains and a large missile with a near-impenetrable hull.

Along with archaeologist Dr. Matthew Roney (James Donald) and his assistant, Barbara Judd (Barbara Shelley), Quatermass struggles to comprehend the astounding find and all its incredible implications. Complicating the scientists' search for the truth are Colonel Breen and his pig-headed military and political allies; they seek to dismiss the discovery as nothing more than a German propaganda weapon from World War II. The truth of the matter is much more significant.

At its heart, *Five Million Years to Earth* concerns itself with nothing less than the origin of mankind's concept of evil and its tendencies for aggression. Beyond that, I'll say nothing more.

I am purposefully skirting specifics on the plot for two reasons. First, Nigel Kneale's brilliant story deserves to be experienced as an unfolding mystery. Also, I could spend the entire column discussing the intricacies of the plot and all its various moral and philosophical implications. Suffice it to say that Kneale's screenplay for "Quatermass and the Pit" garners an entry in *Horror: 100 Best Books*.

As for the Hammer production itself, director Roy Ward Baker does a workmanlike job in presenting Kneale's story. Fortunately, the cast is uniformly superb. To me, at least, Andrew Kier *is* Professor Quatermass, a perfect mix of smoldering anger and passionate commitment to science.

Alas, not everyone agrees. When it was released, *Five Million Years to Earth* fared dismally at the box office. Today, some Hammer fans consider the film "too thoughtful," especially when compared with the gory and shock-filled Dracula and Frankenstein series. Others damn the film because of Baker's pedestrian direction.

I see Baker's work as a boon of sorts, since it interferes little with Kneale's story. A heavy-handed *auteur* could easily damage the plot; if the plans do go forward for a remake of the Quatermass series, I'll be dreading the new Hammer version of this great film.

The Quatermass Conclusion

1980, 107 Minutes
Thorn EMI
Director: Piers Haggard
Cast: John Mills, Simon MacCorkindale, Barbara Kellerman
******

If you want to blast away at the weak direction in any one of the Quatermass films, the final installment most definitely presents the biggest target. Piers Haggard's work on *The Quatermass Conclusion* is miles above his plodding on such notable disasters as *The Fiendish Plot of Fu Manchu*, but that really isn't saying much.

To make matters even worse, the video released as *The Quatermass Conclusion* is nothing more than a hastily condensed, badly edited version of the four-hour special entitled simply "Quatermass."

The final Quatermass story is set in a Britain gripped by anarchy, a sort of post-apocalyptic cityscape without the radiation and mutants. Against this grim backdrop, the aging Professor Quatermass (John Mills) searches for his runaway daughter. Quatermass has

abandoned science and his role as public savior, but over the course of the film he is dragged back into the spotlight.

Groups of disenchanted men and women calling themselves Planet People have begun to gather at sites of ancient power (like Stonehenge). There, they believe, a race of extraterrestrials will reach down and rescue them from the ecologically doomed planet. Of course the columns of light that descend to engulf the cult members are far from heavenly. In fact, you might say they are big combination microwave-straws with which the aliens cook, then transport all the Planet People foolish enough to gather beneath them.

Kneale's concept for Quatermass's swan song is nearly as intriguing as those that propel the other entries in the series. Yet the entire production of *The Quatermass Conclusion* seems muddled and unfocused. Much of the feature film is wasted with repetitious scenes of Quatermass searching for his lost daughter. The alien menace remains nothing more than columns of light beaming from some distant malevolent force. There are hints of interesting character development, but the movie's editing consistently foils any viewer interest; just when we are drawn into someone's story, the film cuts away in mid-scene to pick up another plot thread left dangling earlier.

The Quatermass Conclusion is most definitely the end of this series; Kneale closes the book on the former head of the Experimental Rocket group quite firmly. Considering how wonderful the earlier serials and features were, this is a pretty sad way for Quatermass to go.

❑

The Living Galaxy

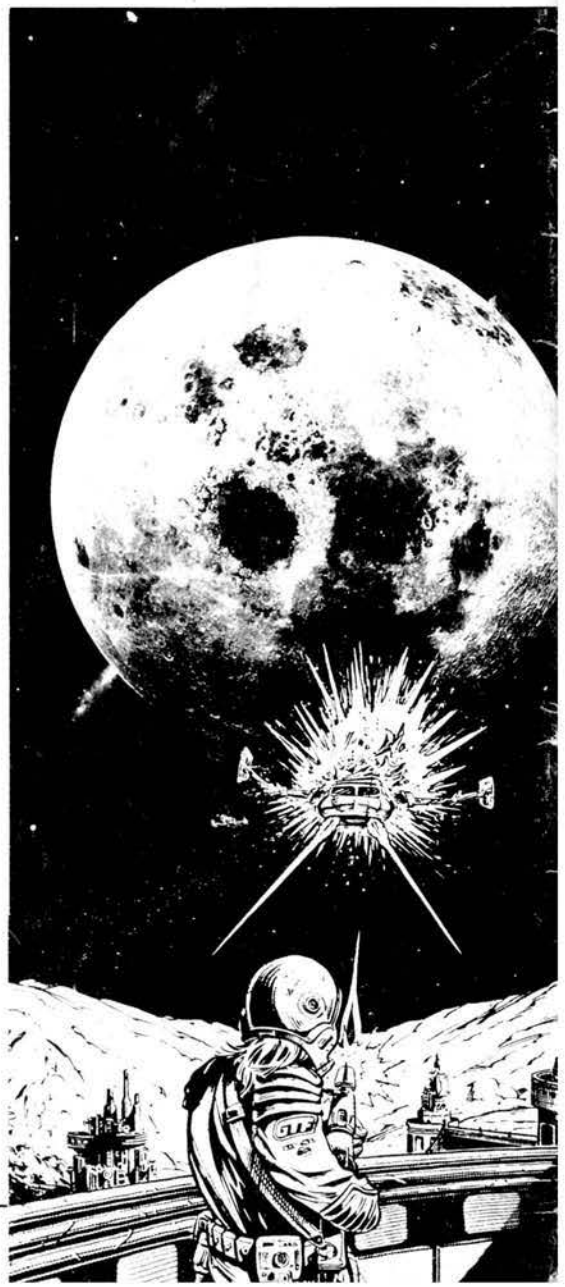
Continued from page 29

Two-Player Campaigns

If I had to give any advice to a group of three gamers who want to run a two-player science fiction campaign, I'd say this: Make the two characters as different as possible. Match up a musclebound mercenary with a bookish scientist, a risk-taking reporter with a burned-out ex-cop, a gorgeous female spy with a nerdy high-tech tinkerer. Mix not only sexes, life philosophies, and ages, but species as well. The interplay between wildly different personality types is the key to adding excitement to any adventure.

Want proof? Get out your video-rental card and check out the following movies: *Red Heat*, *Lethal Weapon* (all three films), *In the Line of Fire*, and *The African Queen*. Go to the library and read about Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser, Holmes and Watson, or Fors and Lura (the post-atomic barbarian and his jungle cat from Andre Norton's *Daybreak: 2250 A.D.*). Look for reruns on TV of "The Green Hornet" (with Kato), "Knight Rider" (with the smart car), "Star Trek" (with Kirk and Spock), and "The Man from U.N.C.L.E." (Admittedly, some episodes of these shows won't highlight the differences between the paired heroes as much as you might like, but you'll get some ideas for ways in which they *could* be different.) Differences in role playing make the difference in gaming.

Humans and nonhumans make a nice combination, as they have since the days of Isaac Asimov's robot novels, like *The Caves of Steel*. The "shellpeople" —the intelligent starships of Anne McCaffrey's *The Ship Who Sang* and subsequent novels) each worked with single humans, forming what was called a "brain-brawn" team. (Again, see this column in issues #60-61 and 69 for details). A human-alien team-up, as appeared in *Enemy Mine* and "Alien Nation," is a nice touch, especially if each is played according to the standards of their social backgrounds.

Readers with an extensive collection of DRAGON® Magazines might wish to look up Katharine Kerr's excellent article, "The Solo Scenario," which appeared in DRAGON Magazine issue #73 (pages 16-20), in May 1983. Next month, we'll return to the issue of one-on-one campaigns and discuss how to generate and run adventures for them—and how not to kill off the entire group of one. Enjoy.

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